

IN THE LAND OF AFTERNOON
LAWRENCE G. GREEN

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CHAPTER 1

BELOW THE BLUE WALL

MY STOEP ON THE RISE above the village has wide horizons, and every window in the cottage holds a great picture of the Cape farmlands. This is a scene Wenning might have painted, this is a Leipoldt poem.

It is not the landscape alone that grips me, for there is something even more spacious than the wise old countryside. From my stoep I can see beyond the veld and the mountains. This evening the veils of time are drawn aside and it seems that I am looking down the centuries of the Cape.

I have been swimming in the dam to earn the glass beside my chair. It is warm as the Durbanville district can be in February, and my five acres are baked hard like the plains of Bushmanland. Next year there will be vines against the brown earth. Next year I hope the dam will be shaded by willows and bamboo. Next summer I shall have to water the young fruit trees to earn my lazy evening drink.

This is the first time in a varied life that the seasons have meant anything to me. I am finding a new interest in planning the little farm, though no more ignorant novice ever tackled such a task. If I had started this place during my restless years it might have been a magnificent farm by now; but it would not have been my life. No, I do not wish to change anything, for I am finding peace on the friendly earth. The long journey, exciting sometimes and in many ways satisfying, has halted on this brick stoep, beside the dam at Durbanville. If I never leave the Cape again I shall not fret.

Someone brought a battery radio to my stoep this afternoon. As a rule I prefer a book to the loud electric echoes of distant entertainment; but I listened to General Smuts and, not without surprise, found myself nodding agreement with every word he spoke. Smuts was talking to the boy scouts, preaching an open-air philosophy. It was so simple and obvious that another speaker might have sounded ingenuous.

“You must seek your strength in nature,” Smuts told them. “Our society has become too artificial, and the world is suffering from it today. We are children of nature and we must live close to nature.” He denounced newspapers and bioscopes, did this stern old mountaineer; and I chuckled because I knew the newspapers would hit back at him for that. Smuts was at his best, and as I sit here beside my dam without even a shirt on my back I feel healthy and righteous.

Now I can hear a familiar droning from the direction of Wingfield. Always the evening Skymaster passes my farm at this minute, regular as the Blue Train or factory whistle. The only difference this evening is that the aircraft has not yet gained its usual height. Beautiful in its way, the bright metal dazzles me for a moment. It is right over my cottage, and lower than I have ever seen it. I can almost glimpse the hostess carrying whisky to the exhausted business men riding in the cushioned interior.

Fast, safe and luxurious, perhaps; but I am heartily pleased to be watching it from my stoep

instead of being hurled forward within the padded cell. I have done with the air and all senseless rush. Those wartime mornings when I flew over the Hex River mountains in parachute harness belong to an almost incredible past. I was in good company then, but those friends have scattered and I am content to watch the sky from my stoep.

To my mind that Skymaster is carrying a cabin-load of nervous breakdowns, high blood pressures and stomach ulcers. Ambitious men, reading their newspapers anxiously; men filled with fear, so that I wonder how they dared step into the aircraft. Men seeking strength in wealth; not mere security, but far more than ever they can spend. Some of them are “successful men” in the worst sense of the phrase. Success can be an ugly and dangerous thing, and for many the effort is too great and the cost too high. Where women are concerned, it is an even more tragic story.

Of course I am too sweeping in my denunciation, for I cannot see inside the Skymaster this

evening. Nevertheless, I prefer the sound of my windmill and the steady flow of water into the dam to the urgent drone of the Skymaster's four propellers. I have a feeling that many of the people up there care nothing for the bright pattern of the Cape below them.

The shadow passes, symbol of the last word in progress. Yet how inferior is the streamlined Skymaster to the old, delicate curves of the Cape on which those air passengers are turning their backs.

The mountains have become a far blue wall, peaks glowing in the sunset; and soon, while the Skymaster roars on towards glaring Johannesburg, the quiet villages of the Cape will be winking under the stars..

For me the scene is dream-like in its darkening glory. I am thinking of all who lit *uitspan* fires and slept in their wagons beside the old Cape roads. All those who crossed the mountain barriers, faced the Bushmen and the wild beasts, suffered under pitiless suns and risked the

flooded rivers. All who sat in wagon-sheds and farm-houses, telling and retelling the Cape folklore and legends in that expressive language which has become Afrikaans.

Last time I crossed the mountains it was in the Blue Train. I wanted to see old friends; and there was another motive I did not realize at the time ... I wanted to remind myself of something.

On the day before my journey I had been digging under the sun on my five acres. Now as the train passed Bellville I sat with two panes of glass between me and the rolling country to the west; air-conditioned, pampered; blue leather at my back and a glass of unrippled sherry on the table against the panelled wall.

As I sat there moving effortlessly into the north an old resolve hardened. I knew to the day when I would return, so that the unrest of older journeys was quietened. And I realized again that my roots were in the Cape, and that no force I could imagine would tear me away again for longer than I wished to remain elsewhere. The

Blue Train was teaching me a lesson I knew by heart.

I always have a queer feeling on this familiar run which, I suppose, many have shared. Through the windows are the remembered scenes; the homesteads, the roads, the towns and villages vanishing inevitably to schedule. Many of those places seemed important to me on certain days of certain bygone years. In that store, where the coloured people are huddled against the corner watching the train, in that country store I once lingered for some forgotten purpose. On some of these stoeps beyond the glass I enjoyed memorable hospitality. On these roads I stopped at will to talk and listen and learn. I slept at the wayside hotels and thought nothing of the trains that rolled past. Now for a day the Blue Train is my world, and I am isolated from the world of past journeys. I am like a ghost flashing helplessly through the scenes of a long career. It will be a miracle if anyone in that outside world should recognize me through the glass - and wave. I am isolated from old halts and old experiences.

Now it is Tulbagh Road, and up the long valley I gaze, like a disembodied spirit, on a far cluster of white buildings against the green of mountain-side. That cluster is Avalon. Only the other day I swam there in the cold stream from the mountain, and walked among the buchu plants with legless Murrogh Nesbitt riding cheerfully beside me on his pony. That was real. A hundred memories framed in this window were once real. Now the countryside is a memory and only the lunch gong of the Blue Train is real. I am not grumbling, for the food and wine at lunch are soothing. But I must record this queer impression.

The men who crossed these mountains in wagons moved in a world of reality. Speed has blurred everything and transformed life into a cinema film. Fortunately this same relentless speed will return me to my stoep at Durbanville before I have time to become nostalgic. I have a Johannesburg newspaper which is holding me longer than I expected. One of those fat Sunday newspapers, with an article by the editor headed

“Plain Talk.” I am startled to find that he is attacking the Cape outlook; a clever and querulous article. “Somewhere between the Rand and the Cape Flats,” he says, “the Transvaal man passes through an invisible barrier which he may sometimes be tempted to describe as being as impenetrable as the Iron Curtain of Europe. The people of the Cape scarcely live in the Union at all ... There is no inducement, except the dire necessity of money-making, for Cape people ever to leave the Western Province, and this fact carries with it the inevitable penalty that they soon cease to think beyond the Western Province. Somehow the most shocking and urgent problems of the Union seem to fade out in the Karoo and their impact is nicely cushioned for Cape Town.”

This is so true that I now know how stupid I was to leave - even for ten days. I should have stayed on my five sheltered acres.

Neither the Skymaster nor the Blue Train can help anyone to understand the gracious background of this Cape countryside. Last century only the people of the Cape, and a few discerning visitors, had a true idea of the land. One of the books in my library, dated 1895, draws an amusing picture of this ignorance.

“The notion which the average Englishman, a generation ago, had of the Cape was truly curious,” declared the writer. “The inhabitants were supposed to be all Boers, dressed in leather crackers and batjes and shod with veldschoons. They all lived in the Karoo, which was everywhere outside Cape Town. The people who were not Boers were Hottentots, and this servile race spoke kitchen Dutch, wore nothing but a skin kaross and rubbed themselves all over with sheep-tail fat and buchu. Nobody but the Hottentots did any work, nobody ever bothered to grow anything for sale, pay any taxes, do anything save sleep through the hot afternoon, smoke pipes and drink coffee. Every man had a plaats which grew as much grain as he wanted, as many grapes as he

cared to make into wine of a sort, as many fruit trees as he had saved pips. The rest was given over to native sheep and goats as would keep him in mutton and milk. It was a country where it was always afternoon.”

I like the last phrase most of all, for am I not savouring the long afternoon on my stoep? But I think that old writer might have thrown into the “curious notion” the Cape tradition of hospitality, honoured on all the remote farms like a Biblical commandment.

During my search for origins I came across this old definition of a Boer: “It signifies a European by descent whose vernacular is the Taal and who uses familiarly no literary European language. It does not denote race of necessity; the Boer may be French, Dutch, German, or of any other blood - one of the most widely spread Boer families is Portuguese - neither does it denote occupation. The Boer is often a farmer and stock-owner; but he may also be a hunter, trader, the president of a republic. He remains a Boer still while the Taal remains his only speech.”

The unknown writer of that passage likened the Boer to a small, medieval town in Europe, miraculously preserved. In this town of narrow streets there would be hand-made carvings over the doors, each line a work of love. The fretwork of a lamp-post would reveal quaint shapings such as no modern workman sends out. On every side the stranger would see a narrower, slower life; but more peaceful, more at one with itself.

Though the people of the remote world of the Cape were called Boers, they were Afrikaners.¹ Theal, the historian, has pointed out that the earlier version of the word is more than two centuries old. Burchell, in 1811, gave this definition: “All those born in the Colony speak

¹ Modern definitions of the term Afrikaner vary. The “Afrikaanse woordeboek” gives the meaning as anyone who belongs to the Afrikaans speaking community, who is Afrikaans through descent or birth: Mr. C. R. Swart, Minister of Justice, has expressed the more liberal view that anyone rooted in South Africa and loving the country is an Afrikaner.

Dutch and call themselves Africaanders, whether they are of Dutch, German or French origin.”

In my own time I remember the late Senator F. S. Malan claiming that the Huguenots were the first true Afrikaners. The English, Hollanders, and Germans, he argued, all had a fatherland to which they could return. For the Huguenots there was no way back, and they left a lasting impression on South Africa.

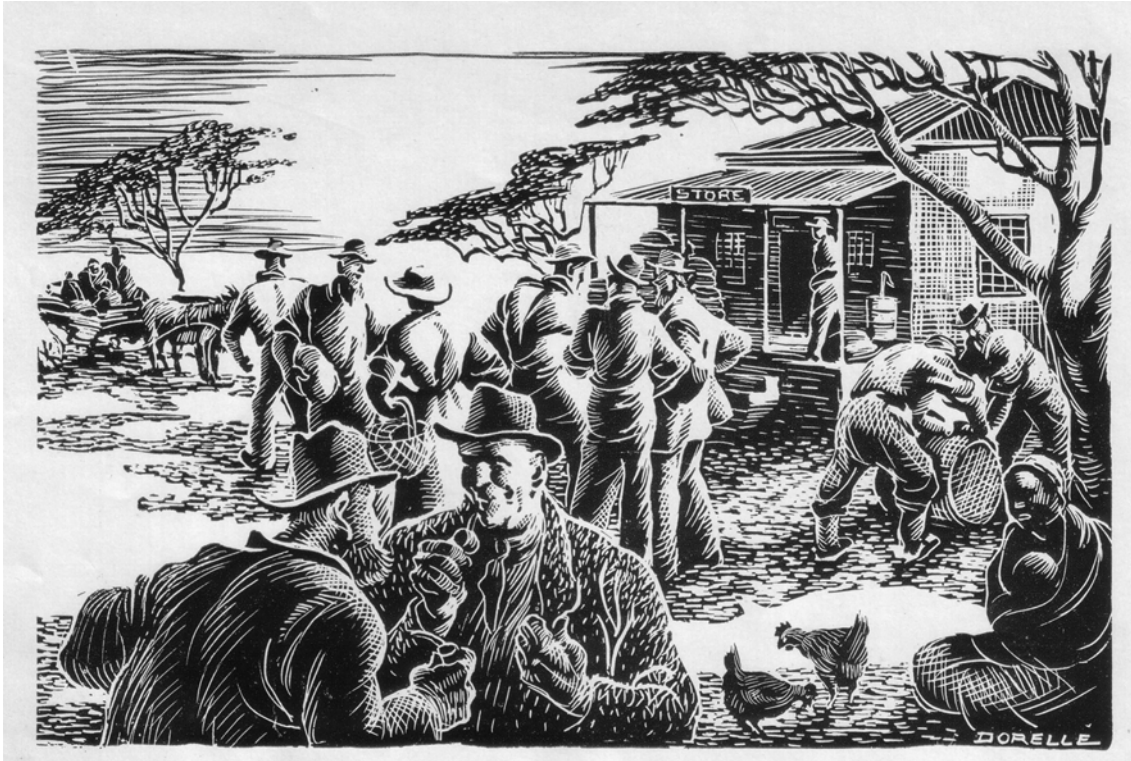
But that phrase lingers in my mind - “the country where it is always afternoon.” That holds a strong appeal for me, and if you analyse it, the fanciful picture of the Cape is not without charm. No doubt there were farmers, here and there, who tallied with the crude description. Perhaps there are some to this day, and good luck to them. No work, no taxes, tobacco, coffee, wine, fruit, mutton and milk; why, the more you think of it, the more of a paradise it becomes.

So much has been written on the virtues of hard work that I think it is time to call a halt. I have seen men ruined by work ... miserable wrecks, the

victims of their own insane ambitions. Possibly there were one or two of them in the Skymaster that has now vanished from these serene skies. One of the most sensible men I know said to me: “I don’t mind a fair day’s work, but I am prepared to make a stand against a hard day’s work.” That man has made a moderate success of everything he has touched, from flying to poultry farming. He has led a fascinating life and nothing has ever worried him for very long.

Many years ago an ambitious young immigrant challenged my easy-going South African philosophy of life. “All you seem to think about, you South Africans, is the week-end,” he declared. “You do nothing but look forward to the week-end and hope the weather will be fine.”

There was deep contempt in his voice, but I survived until the time came when I could enjoy the idea. Possibly the scathing remark gave me a new outlook on life, and crystallized something which had been lurking in the sub-conscious



“Origins of villages are fascinating. Many formed themselves round an uitspan or store, beside a drift or at the foot of a pass.”

mind. That man doubled my pleasure in the South African week-end. I know only one thing better - the long week-end, when you leave your work as early as possible on Friday afternoon and sleep far out in the countryside.

This village of Durbanville, I am thankful to say, is a slow, lazy and unambitious village. It is still a *tipiese boeredorp*, full of character in spite of a modern garage here, a glass-fronted shop there in a row of old-fashioned colonial houses and country stores.

Every village has its milestones, and Durbanville appears to have grown up very much like many others. Origins of villages are fascinating. So, up to a point, are their growths. You can find Cape villages that started as wayside inns. Many villages formed themselves round an *uitspan* or store, beside a drift or at the foot of a pass. The church was the sure nucleus in scores of places. Some villages grew up with characters of their own; others became painfully like dorps over the horizon. But in nearly all of them the milestones were of a definite pattern.

First the cutting up and sale of erven. "Erf," by the way, means "inheritance"; and there are two great classes - irrigated erven and dry erven. An erf is not a farm, but there are people who draw much of their support from a water-erf.

After a church has been built the government usually stepped out and allowed the village to develop until such time as a magistrate, and a gaol, became necessary. It was a great day, a modern amenity indeed, when the gaol was opened. Before long a law agent (who would also act as auctioneer) would set up in practice. Doctors, postmasters, schoolmasters arrived later.

On such haphazard bases many of the gracious oak-shaded Cape villages were established. Old people who came to *nagmaal* would remain and build cottages; the children stayed with them and went to the new school. Hollanders have noted a family resemblance between certain Cape villages and those of the Netherlands province of Overysel; those with parallel lines of houses facing the water furrows. Worcester must have started as an Overysel village, each house with its

fruit and vegetable garden. Always there was the huge *plein* in front of the church where the wagons gathered.

If the houses were built on each side of a main road, the village was a *streekdorp* or *rydorp*. In such places the main street is still Hoofstraat, Mainstraat or Kerkstraat. Early traders preferred to settle at the cross-roads. Such a village is a *kruisdorp*.

Old people here and there can remember the earliest days of places that are now thriving towns no longer remote from Cape Town. Tant Mieta Wolfaardt of Robertson (102 years old in August, 1948) trekked to the site with her parents in 1853. They found two houses. One had a wine-cellar, and a minister from Swellendam held a service once a month, after the inhabitants had rolled out the casks and cleaned the floor. They named the village Robertson in honour of the visiting minister. But the family of Tant Mieta lived in tents in the centre of Robertson for nearly twenty years.

Those were the years that made the Afrikaner independent and conservative. Every man for himself. "*Elkeen wou baas en niemand Klaas*," as they say. Cities were unfriendly and repulsive to them. The men were horsemen and hunters, the finest shots in the world. Old men became patriarchs. Traditions were built up in isolation.

I have seen a map made in 1657 on which the present site of Durbanville is marked Pampoenskraal. Not a dignified name, perhaps, but I can find no serious fault with it. Pampoenskraal it remained for nearly two centuries, a small military outpost, a grazing place and outspan - and a spot where the soil yielded pumpkins. In 1806 a shadowy figure named John Jones secured a grant of land at Pampoenskraal, and this date has always been regarded as the origin of the unhurried and secluded village.

Pampoenskraal watched the laying of the foundations of a church as early as 1825, and the deacons and elders were confirmed in office by the government the following year. The ministers of this Dutch Reformed Church liked

the place so much that from that day to this, only one has been called away. First in this pleasant *gemeente* was the Rev. J. J. Beck. He never served any other community, and he remained at his post for 53 years. Since his death there have been only four, other ministers.

Holman, the traveller and author, passed through Pampoenskraal in 1829 and found “an inn or rather public house kept by an Englishman and a black woman he had purchased for £4 17s. 6d. to act the part of a wife.” The inn-keeper is more vivid than the obscure Jones.

It was one days’ trek from Cape Town by ox-wagon at that period, a hard trek along the sandy *ou Kaapse wapad*. This was the road along the edge of the Cape Flats used from the early days by farmers bringing their sheep and produce to the ships in Table Bay. A faint spoor led through the dunes, between the reeds and renosterbos. The sand was so heavy that twenty oxen were needed to haul a full load; and the struggle went on until John Montagu put convicts to work,

built the *hardepad*, and planted the dunes with wild figs to bind the drifting sands.

The track to Pampoenskraal left Montagu’s road at Twelve Mile Stone, later to become Bellville. Pampoenskraal was named D’Urban in 1837 in honour of Governor Sir Benjamin D’Urban; but the name had to be changed half a century later owing to letters intended for the Natal seaport going constantly astray.

D’Urban farmers were outraged in 1868 when the government put a toll-bar between them and the new railway station at Bellville. They had to pay one and four pence for every full wagon, and eight pence when the wagon returned empty. The “Cape Argus” supported their protests and called it an “exorbitant impost.”

Many years later it was proposed to extend a branch railway line to Durbanville. Again there was an indignation meeting and resolutions of protest were passed by the sensible, unambitious villagers. “We can do without it,” declared a Durbanville spokesman. “The railway will bring

hordes of holiday-makers to the village and the old-fashioned charm will be destroyed.” That was in 1907, and there has been no more railway nonsense since then. Durbanville prefers to be off the iron road.

Most celebrated of clerical visitors was Bishop Grey, who called the village “a small place with sandy soil, without trees.” He added: “It has nothing attractive about it.” That was just over a century ago. He may have been right about the trees; he was certainly wrong about the soil, for it produces the finest wine in the Cape.

In the middle of last century the village had a “Commercial and Literary Institute” with a reading room and language classes. A volunteer cavalry unit was formed, and five hundred people attended the first review. There was a flax factory, too, but in 1870 it was burnt down. The telegraph line reached the village in 1890. At that period wagon-making was a flourishing industry. I wish the wheel-wrights were still at work. They would look up in wonder (but not in

envy) as the Skymaster passed over their forge each evening.

Those giant blue-gums which frame the mountains for miles along the road from Durbanville to Bellville were planted by the Rev. George Lawrence in the 'seventies of last century. Possibly he was thinking of Bishop Grey's bleak description of the district. Old residents have told me that there was not a tree on the road until Mr. Lawrence stirred public opinion and three thousand bluegums were planted. Some of Mr. Lawrence's trees also stand in the grounds of the English Church at Durbanville; and there is one at Bellville railway station.

That avenue, the most impressive array of blue-gums in the Cape, has seen many changes. It was giving shade when Bellville consisted of a tin shanty shared by a cafe proprietor and a black-smith. The sun-dappled road is one that I travelled in my first motor-car, a Model-T, the eucalyptus scent brings memories of those early

country excursions when motoring was an uncertain adventure.

Governor Sir Lowry Cole brought the first blue-gums to the Cape 120 years ago. He had raised plants from Australian seed in Mauritius; and nine of his seedlings were planted in the Cape Town botanical gardens. The largest blue-gum in South Africa is to be seen at Ceres. Within seventy years it has reached a height of 132 feet and a girth of 28 feet. It stands on a bank of the Dwars River - a gnarled and noble descendant of Sir Lowry Cole's original trees.

When all the origins of Durbanville have been obscured by sky-signs I shall know where to seek the past centuries. They will survive on some of the farms.

Wheat was grown in this district in Dutch East India Company's days. From my stoep I can see the gabled homestead and the lands and vineyards of Meerendal. Round the village are older farms, a few granted in the seventeenth

century. Kuiperskraal, Maastricht, Rondeboschjesberg, Diemersdal ... this district has its background, its heirlooms, its old white walls set against the Tygerberg and the Koeberg hills. A great architect once said that the Cape countryside possessed more beautiful houses than any other area of the same size in the world. I can see fragments of that beauty from my stoep, and I know where to find more over the wide horizons.

It is old and rich in tradition, whichever way you look. I like the names the old settlers gave to their discoveries; for sometimes they were inspired and the names fitted the country and clung to places through the centuries. Kloof is the only word for the type of ravine you find in this hinterland. A poort is different from a pass, for it is a passage through the mountains along the bed of a stream. Then there is the hoek which is easy to enter but hard to leave save by the way you came. These words have no exact equivalents in English. A spruit is not a river; a krantz is not merely a cliff, but a steep, rocky

place near the summit of a berg. So you travel on entranced between the vleis, across the vlaktes, through the drifts, past the kraals, over the veld and ruggens. Not far to the north lie Vrymansfontein, Kontermanskloof, Remhoogte, Wolve Dans, Wintervogel, Morgenwacht and Kalabas-kraal ... all picturesque, and some full of the uncertainty of adventurous times.

In the mountains the imagination reaches its greatest moments. Along that blue wall to my right the peaks are glowing in the sunset - Simonsberg, the Groot Drakenstein range, Helderberg, Sneeuwkop, Paarlberg, the Elands Kloof mountains; Paardeberg before me, and beyond that the Porceleinberg and Riebeeck Kasteel. Grand names indeed, but only a few at random from those towering names that bring up so vividly the mountain legends, the mysteries, the stories of achievement or death.

All day the bees have swarmed in the pipe leading from my dam. Now the first bats appear, making sinister and cautious swoops over the water. All over the Cape the flocks are coming in

from the veld to the kraals, antique clasp Bibles are being opened and prayers said. This is the ancestral home of all Afrikaners. Every year in this mellow countryside, a land perfumed by flowers and orchards, tradition sounds a deeper note. This is the pure gold of South Africa.

CHAPTER 2

CHALLENGE OF THE MOUNTAINS

MOUNTAINS MAKE THE CAPE, and I think the wonder of them must influence all who live beneath their ramparts.. When I go out to my stoep tomorrow morning I know that I shall look first towards the distant mountains. Those massive, challenging ranges are never exactly the same.

It would be hard to find a virgin peak in the Western Province, though there were many a few decades ago. Mountaineers are now finding new ways to old summits; they are making frontal ascents where once men dared not climb. A wonderful company, those mountaineers. I know several who started in the early years of the

century and they are still tackling the rock faces week after week.

One of the oldest of them told me about the “Dome of Dreams.” If he had not told me I think the whole rich experience would have been lost, like so many unrecorded mountain adventures. Now I think often of the “Dome of Dreams.”

It is Buffels Dome, jutting up to 5,500 feet from a narrow kloof in the Hex River mountains. On three sides are great precipices; the fourth side, however, has a sensational ridge (known as the Knife Edge) linking Buffels Dome with the Milner Ridge Peaks.

The first man to climb these peaks looked down on Buffels Dome wistfully. He imagined that the Dome would never be climbed, and so he called it the “Dome of Dreams.” Yet it was not long before men crossed the Knife Edge, sitting with their legs over a drop of three thousand feet.

Then came the frontal ascents, made possible by the discovery of a dry waterfall with ledges and gullies of unsound rock leading to the summit.

But the real drama of the “Dome of Dreams” was experienced by a climber who came after the conquerors.

He chose a different route - “open face work, a long and dangerous climb, like the wall of a house, with the rock crumbling away under our boots.” That is how he put it. During the climb he followed a broad ledge and came suddenly upon the most vivid Bushman cave painting he had ever seen.

Part of the painting was lit up by the sun from noon to dusk. He stood entranced at the cave entrance with the sun full on this marvellous scene - Bushmen raiders driving cattle away, pursued by Hottentots. Deeper in the cave, the painting was untouched by the sun; but such had been the skill of the primitive artist in mixing his colours that no part of the long frieze had faded.

Ten years later my friend returned to the “Dome of Dreams.” The painting had lived on the screen of his memory and he longed to set eyes upon it again. He reached the broad ledge and traversed

towards the cave. It is a peculiarity of the Dome, however, that water seeps in behind the rock strata; at night it freezes and sometimes the rock is forced away.

On his first journey there had been a short gap in the ledge, but he had stepped across easily. Now he found that the whole face of the Dome had changed. The gap of eighteen inches had become the end of the ledge. There was only a smooth precipice before him, and no mountaineering trick would enable him to complete the journey to the cave. "One of the finest Bushman paintings in South Africa is there for keeps," he said. "No human eye will gaze into that cave again."

The same climber told me about the drosters' nests in the Cape mountains. Nowadays this expressive Afrikaans word means a disreputable wanderer; but the first drosters were men of all colours who fled from the old Cape settlement and became outlaws. Some went northwards, but most of them took to the mountains.

Etienne Barbier, the French sergeant who deserted from the Castle more than two centuries ago, was a droster. He lived in the Drakenstein mountains; and one Sunday morning, just as the people were leaving the Dutch Reformed Church in Suider Paarl, he appeared with nine armed men and denounced Governor van Hengel as a tyrant. He went from farm to farm urging the owners to refuse to pay their taxes. Barbier was executed when the landdrost caught him. That was the fate of many drosters.

Often the drosters were runaway slaves. One band had their nest in the Simonsberg, four thousand feet above Stellenbosch. My friend found their abode under an overhanging rock. The stone wall they built is there to this day, a wall designed mainly to protect them from the weather. There was an old copper kettle in the nest, and part of a shovel of antique design.

According to a Stellenbosch legend, these drosters raided the farms at intervals. Their hiding place was discovered only as a result of a cock they had stolen. The avenging commando heard the

crowing of the cock - and that was the end of the drosters.

All this happened long ago, but one huge drosters' nest survived until about 1820 or 1830. This was the stronghold in the unexplored mountains between Waaihoek and Wellington; a "lost world" of deep kloofs and unclimbed precipices. The bush in these kloofs is so thick that many a party of experienced mountaineers has been forced back, irritated and baffled - beaten as a rule, however, by lack of time.

One of the almost impenetrable kloofs, they say, ends at a waterfall. If you can find a way up the waterfall, there is a fine and fertile valley where the last of the drosters had their sanctuary.

For years the Bushman and Hottentot drosters descended upon the farms and drove off the cattle. Commando after commando searched for them, but there was no sign of their fires at night and the dogs always lost the scent.

The drosters never stole horses - they had no use for them. But they levied merciless toll on oxen,

sheep and goats. Farmers who encountered the drosters were murdered. Farm servants vanished from time to time, having stolen their masters' guns and ammunition; so that as the years passed the drosters became more dangerous.

At last a Hottentot member of the band was captured in the Wagonmakers Valley. He was handed over to Gabriel Hugo, the Veld Cornet, owner of the farm Waaihoek. By means which can be guessed, Hugo persuaded the Hottentot to lead him to the drosters' nest. A large commando had been organised and every man was determined to end the menace.

They rode as far the horses could go. Then they followed the Hottentot on foot; and at the end of an exhausting day they had not yet reached the nest. Some said the Hottentot had led them astray and were for shooting him. The Hottentot begged for his life and promised that he would lead them to the nest next day.

At dawn the commando moved on. Soon the real climb began, with the men clinging to roots or

using footholds cut into the rock and pointed out to them by the Hottentot guide. At one point they reached a huge wooden ladder, which gave access to a kloof beyond a waterfall. Another difficult place was crossed by the aid of a narrow stone bridge.

Finally the Hottentot indicated that they were nearing the nest, and Hugo ordered his men to load. They crawled to the edge of a basin on the summit of a high ridge and looked down at last into the nest.

Noon, and the smoke was rising from many fires. There were people in front of huts and caves, scores of men smoking, women cooking, children playing. The farmers crept along the rim of the basin and opened fire.

After the first volley the drosters surrendered and pleaded for mercy. More than a hundred prisoners were taken, and then the farmers searched the drosters' nest. It was clear they had been there for years - vineyards were flourishing and the sizes of fruit trees gave clear proof of long occupation.

In the caves and pondoks the farmers discovered heaps of skins, the horns of many stolen cattle, and all sorts of property that had vanished from their farms. Guns and gunpowder were also found, in such quantities that the farmers felt they had been fortunate in taking the drosters by surprise.

When all the drosters had been rounded up they were given loads of stolen goods to carry. As the last member of the commando passed across the narrow stone bridge, a charge of gunpowder was laid and the bridge was blown up. Hugo led his commando and all the prisoners back to the Wagonmaker's Valley in triumph.

Some of the captured women and children had never seen white people in their lives. When they came down the mountain, however, they were even more surprised at the sight of horses. They called them "oxen without horns."

Many attempts have been made to rediscover the droster's nest in the Waaihoek mountains. The legend survives; and sometimes, when farmers in

the area lose their sheep, they say that a new generation of drosters have occupied the old mountain stronghold.

About twenty-five years ago a party of members of the Mountain Club believed they had found a clue to the drosters' nest. They had gone deep into the lonely recesses of Jan du Toit's Kloof until the kloof became a cleft only twenty feet wide. Turning a corner, they saw a perpendicular waterfall, sixty feet high; and at one side a huge, rough ladder.

The climbers were reluctant to trust the rickety ladder entirely, for though massive in parts it was old. They used their rope, passed fearfully over a bulge in the rock where the ladder leant outwards, and gained the stream above the waterfall. As the last climber reached the top, the ladder swayed sideways. The climbers expected to see the whole structure collapse, and wondered whether their retreat would be cut off.

Not far up the bed of the stream they encountered another waterfall. They spent an uncomfortable

night in a narrow ravine. Time was against them, and progress was so slow that they decided to return. With the aid of the rope all of them climbed down the ladder safely. For long afterwards the mystery of the ladder filled their minds.

The discovery received some publicity, and at last came the explanation. In the early years of this century a party of buchu gatherers were at work in the area. They searched many remote kloofs for the valuable herb; and one day they arrived at the waterfall and saw the kloof beyond the waterfall. Buchu grew richly there. Abel Marthinus, the leader, was determined to reach it. He climbed with one companion and gained the summit of the waterfall.

It was an achievement. Other climbers, including experienced members of the Mountain Club, tackled the wall afterwards, but failed. The men with Marthinus refused to follow him (with the one exception I have mentioned); but much buchu was going begging and Marthinus thought over the problem.

He planned the ladder, cut spars in a neighbouring kloof and set his men to work. That was in December, 1913. It took eight men four days to construct the ladder, and other buchu gatherers repaired it from time to time and used it during the next eight years. The rotting upper portion still hangs from the precipice beside the waterfall. Though the ladder was not built by drosters, it was an adventurous enterprise and a strange relic to find in a lonely kloof.

Only in January 1949 was Jan du Toit's Kloof conquered. Many climbers had seen the ladder and, as I have said, a few had gained the ravine beyond and reached the fourth waterfall in the long series of waterfalls that bar the way to the highest point of the kloof.

The six climbers who set out in January little knew that there were altogether fourteen waterfalls on the route. It took them five days to cover ten miles - five days of incredibly hazardous climbing. When they came to the sixth waterfall they found that no detour was possible, and they went up the slippery rocks with the water pouring

over them. One kloof they penetrated was only thirty inches wide. The twelfth waterfall was five hundred feet high, and when darkness came they were still climbing. There was nothing for it but to spend the night on a foot-wide ledge. They were encouraged by the certainty that this was unknown country. The final waterfall was also five hundred feet high; and at the end they had climbed four thousand five hundred feet from the kloof entrance. It was then an easy journey to the hut on Waaihoek peak.

Jan du Toit's Kloof, a mysterious area explored for the first time half way through the twentieth century, forms a strong contrast with DuToits-kloof, opened up a few months later as a national road.

One mountain in the Cape is more formidable than the Matterhorn. This is Toverkop - that sinister peak near Ladismith, the "Witch's Head," a rock without an easy route.

When this peak was first climbed by Gustaf Nefdt, a twenty year-old farmer, in 1885, the feat was hailed as the finest mountaineering achievement ever known in any part of the world. Some said that only a novice, unaware of the danger, would have attempted it. A previous attempt in 1850, led by one Ziervogel, had failed and there is a story that several lives were lost.

Have you ever seen Toverkop? Even at a distance the dome shaped head, split as though by lightning, strikes a peculiar chill in the onlooker. The summit is 7,225 feet (twice the height of Table Mountain), but only the last pinnacles are difficult. You can see Toverkop seventy miles away. You can walk up to the final, sundered dome, the last four hundred feet. And there, unless you are an expert climber, you will stay.

Sometimes the dome of Toverkop is snowbound. Usually in winter the rock is ice-clad, so that hardened climbers are defeated by cramp. Many who climb Toverkop leave blood from their fingers on the rock.

They say that a witch was crossing the mountain one night, and was baffled near the summit. In her rage she split the dome with her wand. So today there are the Eastern and Western pinnacles; the Eastern ascent is an ordeal, the Western a climb only to be attempted by the most skilful mountaineers.

Gustaf Nefdt was born within sight of Toverkop, and lived all his life in the homestead at the entrance to Seven Weeks Poort. His strength was in his fingers. Often he climbed the unplastered walls of the farmhouses for exercise, using tiny grips and hanging on like a fly. He owed his life to those queer exercises.

Nefdt led a party of fifteen men to the base of the dome. They slept there; and before the others were awake, Nefdt went on alone, without rope, and chose instinctively the shortest and easiest route up the Western pinnacle. All except the first pitch. No one, I believe, ever followed Nefdt's exact route on that section. It was a superhuman feat. No other man could have done it without Nefdt's fingers.

Some have argued that Nefdt had the advantage of grips which have since broken off. Geologists will not allow this theory. The rock on Toverkop is hard and unchanging. Nefdt climbed that wall as no man had ever climbed before. He may or may not have been aware of the risks he was taking, but he climbed it.

On the summit, which is about the size of a football field, he made a beacon and left a sock. Then he returned more hazardously than he had climbed up, and told his friends that Toverkop had been conquered.

No one would believe him. The walls of Toverkop are perpendicular; it is a grim place; and Nefdt's friends said they would grant him his triumph only when he brought the missing sock down with him.

There was no time that day. For a fortnight Nefdt brooded over the disbelief which he encountered everywhere. Then he found two volunteers to accompany him to the summit, and set off with witnesses to repeat the climb.

This time he took a rope, and hauled the two men after him. He was searched before the climb; he recovered the sock; and to make absolutely sure he carried a mirror and flashed to the incredulous people of Ladismith. That settled all doubts – the flashes, and the sock and the two men Nefdt brought down with him.

No one ever jeered at Nefdt after that. For twenty-one years no one attempted the climb. Then, in April 1906, a brilliant climber tackled the Western Pinnacle. He was G. F. Travers Jackson, a member of the Alpine Club and a man who had pioneered many routes on Table Mountain and the country peaks. Jackson and a farmer named Arnold Boothman had already conquered the Eastern Pinnacle; now they were determined to stand where only Nefdt and his followers had stood.

Jackson and Boothman had to grasp layer after layer of ice. Their fingers were numb when they reached the summit. But they were not too exhausted to follow the Nefdt tradition by flashing to the village; and the whole village

flashed back. The frame of Nefdt's mirror was still on the summit; and they also saw Nefdt's rope hanging where he had left it during the second descent.

Five years passed, and another party assembled and stared at the sandstone and polished granite of Toverkop's Western Pinnacle. The leader was A. A. Jurgens, a man who started climbing in 1902 and never missed a week-end on the heights for twenty-six years. With him were the redoubtable W. C. West and two others.

According to legend, Toverkop is haunted. The coloured carriers with this party would not sleep; they lit a fire and kept it burning all night. West and Jurgens suffered from cramp while roped on the final precipice, an experience new to both of them. They came to one narrow terrace where there were no hand-holds; and they had to sidle along precariously with their faces close to the rock.

At one point West had to dislodge a chockstone, which fell into the ravine three hundred feet

below: Footholds near the summit, said West, were no larger than walnuts. On the summit they made a fire of bushes as a signal to the people of Ladismith.

West told me that he felt like a "pinned butterfly" when cramp gripped him while stranded on the rock face during the descent. His hat was knocked off, and he watched it fall vertically, touching the rock only once before it settled on the bottom ledge.

I asked Jurgens for his impressions. He said that if it had not been for a fault in the sandstone, the climb would have been impossible. "You had to push one hand into the crack, then wedge the other hand in the same way, and finally use your toes," recalled Jurgens. "I had severe cramp in both hands at the top."

It is a queer fact that though many have climbed Toverkop since 1885, no one has followed the exact route chosen by Nefdt. He left no written record, but it is clear enough that, in spite of all technical progress since

then, Nefdt was the only man capable of climbing the way he did.

Toverkop has been climbed again and again in recent years. Each party has built its own beacon and left its own record - for Toverkop has its own traditions. West and Jurgens and their friends scratched their names on a coin and left it there.

When there are a hundred beacons on Toverkop the Mountain Club will give a dinner to all surviving members who have done the great climb.

What is the most difficult climb in the Cape? Last century, as you have seen, it was Toverkop. Twenty-five years ago the man who could make the frontal ascent of Little Winterhoek in the Tulbagh district was a hero among mountaineers.

George Londt was the genius who led the way up Winterhoek frontal. On Table Mountain or

in the country this short, muscular man became an inspired leader, fearless to a degree - too bold as events proved. He loved a new route, and during more than a decade when he was in his prime he pioneered many a sensational overhang and almost impossible ascent.

It was in December, 1920, that Londt and three companions started up the terrific four-thousand foot face of Klein Winterhoek. They used rubber shoes, one man standing on another's head when that was the only way of reaching a crack above a ledge. In one place Londt found a grip for one hand only; he used the other to push himself upwards against a flat surface. The wall fell away into space, but Londt and his party went on.

They had to traverse constantly to avoid overhangs and bulges. The eighty-foot rope was often too short. If they had depended on footholds they would never have reached the summit; but handholds were enough for Londt. He was an expert when he came to a

hand-traverse - which means that the feet are useless and dangling over a precipice.

One point on this climb almost defeated him. "Be ready for anything," he called to the next man. He clung to a mere flake of rock overhead, changed feet and climbed on. That was Londt's finest day. The ascent of the exposed face lasted nine and a half hours. If the Klein Winterhoek climb is fairly simple today, it is entirely due to the beacons left all along the route by Londt. He was the pathfinder of the heights.

Londt made his last climb on November 13, 1927. He was tackling the final pitch of Rainbow Crag on Table Mountain when he fell sixty feet to his death. Londt had been climbing for seventeen years; he had reached the highest point on Kilimanjaro and had made climbing history on many peaks. Many regard him as the finest mountaineer the Cape has ever produced.

Since Londt's conquest of Klein Winterhoek, two frontal routes of greater severity have been discovered on other Cape mountains.

One was the frontal wall of Milner Peak, which, you will remember, is near the "Dome of Dreams." There is a ninety foot section of sheer rock which only the most experienced climber can hope to tackle successfully; and then the even more difficult final cliff - a really frightening precipice. Men who make light of heights have confessed afterwards that they found Milner Peak awe-inspiring. It is shorter than Winterhoek, but the holds are tiny.

The other climb, I believe, has only been done once. This is the Castle Rock frontal above Ceres, a supreme test of climbing ability. "It is short, but forbidding," a seasoned mountaineer told me. "If you find a hold as large as a ticky on that face, you are lucky."

The second party to attempt the climb, three men and one woman, were caught in a north-west gale on "lunch ledge" after nearly five hours

climbing. They had to spend a freezing night on this narrow ledge with a four-hundred foot drop below. A fire was a necessity. Fuel was collected by dangling a volunteer over the precipice at the end of the rope. He tore just enough bush out of crevices to boil the billy.

That night they passed the rope round their sleeping bags, and it saved them; for the rain would have washed them off, and the wind would have blown them away. They “abseiled” down next day; lowered down the rope, found a belay and went down again, covering the whole descent in this manner. Fortunately the hail came only when they reached the slope at the foot of this vertical, sensational rock.

No doubt Castle Rock frontal will be climbed again, but it may long maintain its place as the most difficult climb in the Cape.

Many of the Cape mountains have their legends, and even the Toverkop tale is far less grim than the legend of Gordon Rock on Paarl mountain.

Drive up the Jan Phillips Road, and you reach Paarl Rock (or Paarl Diamant) first. Phillips, by the way, was the famous wagon-maker who agitated for the mountain road. It cost £8,000 and Phillips paid £2,000 himself. One of the old signal cannon from the Dutch Company’s days lies on Paarl Rock. Throughout the Cape these rusty cannon are used only on great occasions. It is on record that one Geldenhuys fired the Paarl Rock cannon to celebrate Queen Victoria’s Jubilee. This cannon was charged again in 1910 during the Union celebrations, and Generals Botha and de Wet were both present when it was touched off. “Where is the man who is against Union?” inquired General de Wet rhetorically. “Let him stand in front of the cannon and I will blow him to pieces.”

Britannia Rock was formerly Bretagne of the Huguenots - though I have never found the origin of the name. Two leaning rocks near Britannia form the *danssaal*, where open-air dances were once held. Chains and iron poles were provided at the time of Prince Alfred’s

visit; but Britannia is easily climbed; so easy is the slope that a jeep conquered the rock not so long ago.

Finally there is Gordon Rock, and this grey granite dome is the home of the legend. There is a deep crevice near the summit of the rock; and a boy named Gordon is said to have slipped into this crevice and remained there, seriously injured and beyond human aid. His father, duly authorised by the landdrost, fired the “mercy shot” that put him out of his agony.

Official records in Paarl, I must add, have been searched again and again for corroboration of this story, but without result. A man named Johan de Villiers did fall into the crack many years ago. He was hauled out, with nothing worse than a broken arm, by three schoolboys....

I think the Gordon Rock legend is no more than a scrap of folklore which has arisen in all countries where huge rocks reveal dark clefts. Probably it is true in some places. Certainly the

story is told wherever the rock formation makes it credible.

A similar legend has grown up round Paardeberg, between Paarl and Malmesbury; and the old post-cart drivers used to halt between Ashton and Montagu and point to a deep fissure in the Cogmans Kloof Mountain, and relate a similar tragedy. Only there it was a youth named Botha, climbing in search of honey, who missed his footing ...

Paarl is proud of these shining rocks above the town. Many believe they are the largest rocks in the world, and I am unable to contradict them. Centuries ago the Bushmen of the valley looked at the rocks in wonder and saw in them the shapes of dragons. They said the dragon rocks rose up to gaze upon the first white people landing in Table Bay; and having risen, the rocks remained in their present positions. At all events you can see Table Bay from Paarl mountain on a clear day.

One of the veteran climbers in the Cape is Mr. William C. West, whose Toverkop ascent I have already described. Past seventy he is still to be found on a mountain summit every Sunday.

West was the first British subject to reach the top of Kilimanjaro; he has conquered many other peaks, and has been honoured by election to membership of the world's most exclusive club for climbers, the Alpine Club. (There are not more than half a dozen South African members.) Yet when you ask William West about his famous ascents you find him describing the feats of his companions.

He has known most of the famous mountaineers of his day, and has lectured on climbing before distinguished audiences in London, the Hague and Berlin. General Smuts (who always calls him "Kilimanjaro" West) has presided at his lectures for South African war charities. Smuts and West have often climbed together.

As a boy West once met Edward Whymper, the great mountaineer who conquered the Matterhorn.

He knew George Mallory, lost on Everest; and climbed Table Mountain with a survivor of that ill-fated expedition, Major N. E. Odell. Among West's correspondents was Professor Hans Meyer, who made the first Kilimanjaro ascent.

"I was born in England, but my mother had Swiss ancestors and told me I was bound to become a mountaineer," West once told me. "She was right, though I had never climbed a peak when I arrived in Cape Town during the South African War. I was fond of botany, and that led me naturally to Table Mountain."

West has not kept a complete record of his Table Mountain climbs, but he speaks with pride of the 2,600 ascents of Cape peaks (a total of 7,500,000 feet) made by his old mountaineering friend Mr. K. Cameron. West and Cameron have climbed Table Mountain² together five hundred times by various routes.

² The story of Table Mountain is told in "Tavern of the Seas" by Lawrence G. Green (Timmins).

“I have never professed to be a brilliant climber, but in my younger days I was always ready to tackle anything - often with someone else in the lead,” declared West.

In the early years of the century West and his friends took the train into the country and walked for miles to reach the peaks. Many a Sunday night they waited on Wellington station for the four a.m. train from Johannesburg. Now they leave Cape Town by car at five a.m. and start climbing two hours later.

West believes that the Cape mountains produce some of the most brilliant cragsmen in the world. The young men now, he says, tackle climbs which he would have regarded as impossible in his youth. That is due to improved technique and clever use of the rope.

“I have never been in a tight corner - I am always too careful,” West remarked. “But I did have a narrow escape once, on Slangolie Buttress on the Camps Bay side. I was following a fine climber when he dislodged a large stone and a clod of

earth. This heavy mass glanced off my shoulder. That is one of the unavoidable risks of climbing, and it happened only once to me.”

West’s climbing ability was put to its most practical use by the late Sir Frederick de Waal at the time when the Chapman’s Peak drive was being planned. The survey of the route involved hazardous climbing, and West enjoyed a perfect mountaineering holiday at the expense of the Provincial Council. He marked the course of the present road with white calico strips, which fluttered from precipices and guided the road builders.

At first no one would accompany West on this frightening task, but finally a coloured man agreed to join him. Roped together, they traversed the route from Noordhoek to Hout Bay in a day.

In his city office Mr. West has a complete set of the “Mountain Club Journal,” for which he recently refused an offer of £100.

He often gazes out of his high office window towards the mountain he knows so well. He

believes that the modern young climber is so skilful that the limit of achievement is being reached.

“There is enough climbing by new routes, however, to keep this generation busy - and leave something for their successors,” sums up West, the veteran.

In the country, and especially in the Worcester area, a notable pioneer was the late Mr. Izak Meiring. As a government surveyor he made a number of first ascents and accurately determined the heights of many famous peaks.

Great Winterhoek above Tulbagh was thought for many years to be the highest peak in the Western Province. From there you can see the ocean in the west, Saldanha Bay, the Cedarberg range, even distant Toverkop. The height of Great Winterhoek is 6,840 feet. But there is a greater peak; you can see it from the train window as you go up through the Hex River mountains to the Karoo. It is Matroosberg, five miles from the railway line -

7,378 feet in height. The railway view reveals a perpendicular cliff, but on the Ceres side there is a perfect snow slope leading to the summit.

Meiring has left his name on the map. Behind Brandwacht, the climber's favourite peak in the Worcester district, you will find the Izak Meiring plateau, snow-covered in winter. A bronze tablet has been placed in the face of a boulder at 5,300 feet by the Mountain Club in memory of Meiring. The inscription reads: “He loved the mountains.”

Mountaineering is a new pastime, not yet a century old. Fifty years ago a number of the miniature Matterhorns of the Cape were virgin heights. There is still much unexplored country in the great bush-filled kloofs where the klipspringer and bushbuck roam. And every week-end of the year the climbers are out there, staring at possible lines of ascent; scrambling up buttresses; following cracks and “chimneys”; hammering the cliffs with their fists to test the soundness of the rock; traversing exposed ledges with only the air below them; roped and pinned against dangerous faces; fully conscious of life as they move up the

precipices; brought by their own skill at last to distant summits.

On the summits are the beacons and the records of past climbs that no true mountaineer will violate. Under small stone cairns are the bottles and tin boxes in which each party leaves the record of the climb; romantic repositories that often remain for years unvisited and unopened. Of course there have been vandals, and I am told that a parchment signed by climbers in the days of Simon van der Stel was found on Simonsberg, removed and lost.

No doubt the first climbers were farmers staking their claims to land centuries before the Mountain Club was formed. They left beacons about three feet in height. In our time came the government trigonometrical survey, and more massive cairns. Finally there are the new white-washed concrete cylinders which mountaineers dislike especially when the surveyors destroy the older beacons and the valuable records with them. But there are peaks the farmers and the surveyors could not climb. There stand the

solitary little beacons of the climbers, and there they remain undisturbed.

They remain, too, in the memories of the mountaineers. These heights exert a strong influence, like the sea, over those who know the solitudes. They call men back, again and again, and men with the physique remain faithful even in old age.

Those who can climb no more remember their mattresses of slangbos, the grey bush that makes the finest of all open-air beds. They think of nights when they saw the silhouettes of the giants against the moonlit sky; nights when the odour of buchu mingled with the sweet smell of the renosterbos in the fire; the scents of the winds, the mist, the wet soil, the pines and the flowers.

They remember the stews they made in blackened billy-cans. The mountain streams where they rested among the ferns. The sound of boots on rock, rain on canvas, beetles and frogs, owls and jackals, and the barking of baboons.

And above all, the high places where, on rare occasions, there is no sound. Mountains make the Cape, and every mountaineer has his own "Dome of Dreams."

When the first explorers faced these mountains which I am gazing upon from my stoep, when they stared at these heights their eyes inevitably sought ways through the barrier. Yet they were seldom the real discoverers of the mountain passes into the hinterland.

Sir Lowry's Pass, as we call it, is the oldest of all. This was the Gantouw of the Hottentots; but long before the Hottentots great herds of eland crossed the mountains by this route to feed where Somerset West now stands. They came down towards the sea on their spring migration and returned in autumn to their mountain pastures.

Only three years after Van Riebeeck's landing the first Dutch expedition followed the track beaten out by the hooves of the eland and saw

False Bay from the summit. Corporal Muller was the leader, a lazy fellow accompanied by the crafty Herry, a Hottentot who had made a voyage in an English ship.

One party after another bound for Swellendam and Knysna used this pass. First they called it Elands Pad, then Hottentots Holland Kloof, and much later Onderkloof. Wagons crossed the mountains there in the seventeenth century; and for more than a hundred years the wheels scored the rocks so deeply that the marks are still visible.

But it was dangerous. At the steepest point the wagons had to be unloaded. Slaves and oxen carried the freight or dragged it by chains. Andrew Sparrman, the Swedish naturalist, followed the rough track in 1775 and described a precipice down which cattle and wagons had often fallen. He noted the skill of the drivers, flicking the oxen with the long whip lashes so that the teams brought the wagons out of pits and over large stones.



Brink's Inn at the foot of Sir Lowry's Pass.

Near the foot of the pass was the farm Goedeverwachting, and the farmhouse became Brink's Inn. You can still see the old road crossing the grounds. Many of the early travellers whose books are now so valuable toiled up the heights and shuddered as the oxen tore their hooves on the jagged rocks.

It cost only £7,000 to make the pass safe, but the Secretary of State in London grudged the money. If the merchants of Cape Town had not come to the aid of Governor Sir Lowry Cole there would have been further delays. That great road-maker, Colonel Charles Michell, carried out the work. Sir Lowry's Pass was opened in 1830. One farmer told Mitchell that the new pass saved him a wagon a year.

Before the Caledon railway was built, Sir Lowry's Pass was the scene, every year, of the famous "grain race." Some of the wheat and wool of the Swellendam district was loaded in the Breede River and went by sea to Cape Town; but Caledon and Bredasdorp sent their produce in wagons. The wagons took the old *Bolandse*

pad; and when there was no urgency the round trip, Caledon to Cape Town and back, took ten days.

Grain was different. The new season's wheat was rushed to market, and in 1872 a Caledon farmer covered the 75 miles to Cape Town in eighteen hours - no mean achievement. It could not have been done in wet weather, of course, for the clay roads became slippery. Nevertheless, in ideal conditions, the average time during the grain race was twenty-four hours.

Those drivers (usually the owners of the grain) must have had steel hands and wrists. The pace was too strenuous for one man, and *leiselhouers* (rein-holders) helped. Each wagon loaded with grain weighed five thousand pounds. The horses must have been as magnificent as the men.

You can still trace the halts along that busy road. One was Knoflooks Kraal, now surrounded by trees, but a Hottentot settlement on open veld in Van Riebeeck's time. It is a very old name. Koffiekraal was another; and this has now

become Elgin. The section from the foot of the pass to Cape Town was the most difficult, owing to the sand. Drivers were always glad to reach the Hardekraaltjie *uitspan*, on the present site of Bellville; for as the name suggests, it was a firm patch in the sandy ocean.

The grain and wool days were the greatest days Sir Lowry's Pass has known. Generations of wagon drivers talked round the *uitspan* fires at the foot of the pass. Tales of the road, the romantic road - tales that linger in the folklore of the people in the great districts beyond the pass.

Water from a huge lake that once covered the Tulbagh valley broke through the mountains millions of years ago and formed the Tulbagh Pass.

Hottentots took their cattle through the deep ravine, never thinking that their descendants would see the Blue Train in this gap. The first white man to penetrate the chasm was Pieter

Potter, sent out by Van Riebeeck not long after the lazy Mullers' eastward journey.

Roodezand was the eighteenth-century name of the pass. Thunberg the botanist went through in 1772 and left his impressions on record: "In some places it was so narrow that two wagons could not pass each other. It is usual for drivers to give several terribly loud smacks with their long whips which are heard at a distance of several miles, so that the wagon that arrives first may get through unimpeded before another enters it."

You remember Etienne Barbier the droster? His head and right hand were fixed to a pole at the entrance to Roodezand. The pole was still there at the beginning of last century. This grim landmark has gone, but the flat boulder called Bushman's Rock remains. From there the Bushmen kept watch against their hereditary enemies, the Hottentots.

Elephants led the way and stamped the original track that is now the Fransch Hoek pass. I have a

letter from a man whose father watched the last herd of elephants crossing “Olifants Kloof” into the interior. Fransch Hoek, of course, was once Olifants Hoek. The farmers hated the elephants, for they raided vineyards and grain lands.

Builder of the earliest road was a farmer named S. J. Calls, with W. F. Hertzog as his surveyor. That was in 1819, and the road was called Catspad.

This man Cats followed the path taken year after year by the elephants migrating with their young to the high veld. A little goat wagon, like a child’s plaything, carried supplies to the men working on the heights. This wagon, made in the eighteenth century and believed to be the oldest in South Africa, is preserved on a Fransch Hoek farm. Catspad has not entirely vanished, though much of it is covered by bush.

It was a rough pass that Cats built, and after it had been in use for only four years Lord Charles Somerset authorised a proper road. He was thinking not so much of the needs of the district

as of finding work for the men of the recently disbanded Royal African Corps.

These old red-coats were drinking and rioting in Cape Town, and the only alternative would have been to send them back to England at great expense. Lord Charles put them to work on the pass under the supervision of a Royal Engineers officer.

Unskilled as road-makers, the soldiers cursed, protested - and worked. They cursed the rains that washed them out of their tents in winter, the summer heat that flayed them, the leopards that menaced them at night. On the Villiersdorp side they toiled in a rocky valley that they named Purgatory.

But at a cost of £8,375 they made a pass which carried wagon, and later motor traffic. for more than a century. It was a safe road, yet in November, 1867, it was the scene of the most sensational wagon accident the country had ever known. I have rescued the details from the old Cape Town newspaper, the “Zuid Afrikaan.” A

French Hoek farmer named Lotter was returning from Villiersdorp with his bullock wagon loaded with oat sheaves and wheat. His wife and baby and four older children and Gabriel Louw, a friend, were passengers in the wagon. They reached the point where the old toll-house stood. Here the pole came adrift, and the wagon fell over the precipice - a drop of a thousand feet.

Lotter was out of the wagon at the time. Louw, Mrs. Lotter and her baby, and two sons, jumped clear. The two remaining children fell with the wagon. The parents saw the wagon being shattered against a projecting rock.

“Who could describe a parent’s gratitude when the father, descending as fast as possible to the valley below, found his children alive,” said the newspaper report. “The boy was without a scratch, the girl, although much hurt and torn, without any fracture or serious injury.”

The old Fransch Hoek pass fell into disrepair, but it was not until 1930 that the Divisional

Council labelled it “Dangerous.” Then came the depression, and a new pass was built.

Peaks on either side of the Fransch Hoek pass are much higher than Table Mountain, and the crossing of the nek is a dramatic experience. This point is one of the great watersheds of the Cape. Here a drop of rain may split, one part going down the Breede river to the Indian Ocean, the other flowing with the Berg river to the South Atlantic.

Bain’s Kloof has been called the “child of yesterday,” though it will be a centenarian in 1953. Bain’s Poort was the earlier name, and the whole achievement is bound up with the strong personality of Andrew Geddes Bain.

He was an explorer, trader, geologist and soldier before he left his indelible marks on the Cape mountains. Many of the fossil reptiles he collected are in the British Museum. Though he also built Michells’ Pass and the Katberg road, Bain’s Kloof is his real memorial.

Incredible though it may seem, much of the Bain's Kloof route was unknown country less than a century ago. There was great need for a shorter road between Cape Town and the fruitful basin of the Warm Bokkeveld; the farmers were bringing their produce through Tulbagh pass and wasting days on every journey.

Bain was out shooting in the Worcester mountains with John Montagu, the energetic colonial secretary, and Charles Bell, surveyor-general. Bain noticed a kloof which seemed to lead in the direction of Wellington, and pointed it out to his companions. "You had better investigate," suggested Montagu.

Farmers and even the field-cornet confessed to Bain that they had never explored the kloof. Some said they had gone into the kloof in search of runaway slaves; but they had never reached the end. They thought the kloof came to a dead-end in a cave.

Bain went into the mountains to make his own survey. He came out excited. "I have discovered

a north-west passage - but the job will be expensive," he reported.

Montagu replied: "Bain's Poort will be your next job. It is refreshing to work with a man of your zeal and energy."

So the stupendous task began early in 1849. From first to last more than a thousand convicts broke the rock that barred the path. Soldiers acted as warders. Dangerous convicts worked in chains, and were secured at night to iron rings cemented into the rocks. The well-behaved men lived in the white-washed convict station.

On the Wellington side the work was easy, apart from an attempt to cut a tunnel through one of the mountain spurs. This failed, and the road was taken for three-quarters of a mile round the obstacle. But on the Worcester side, spades were useless. Gunpowder, which cost £1,200, had to be used to shift the huge masses of rock. Ten miles of the road (which is 18¼ miles in length) were blasted.

They made more fuss over official openings last century than the public would tolerate today. Banquets and dances went on for days in Paarl and Wellington. Five arches bearing Latin inscriptions were set up along Bain's Kloof. There was a ceremony at each bridge, and the unused gunpowder was touched off on the hill tops as a special treat. The convicts who had completed the job were granted remissions in their sentences. Bain's Kloof was open, after four and a half years of tremendous effort.

Bain himself declared that he would rather build another pass than address the crowd.

Many passes have been built since then, and there are two that always grip my imagination.

One is the austere Swartberg, linking the sun-scorched Karoo with the green veld and forests of the coast. A thousand convicts had to labour for five years on that job; and they hacked out a road that runs up almost to the altitude of the Rand and is covered with snow in winter. One of the stone

houses collapsed under the weight of snow while the pass was being built; many of the convicts inside died from exposure.

You can still see the walls of the houses used by the convicts. There is a convict graveyard, too - one hundred and fifty of them died or were accidentally killed during the building of the pass. The summers were hard but the winters were ghastly; and always the warders kept watch with dogs.

It was in 1886 that Sir Gordon Sprigg, Prime Minister of the Cape, opened the Swartberg Pass and Miss Gertrude Schermbrucker broke a bottle of champagne on the summit. The work had cost £80,000.

The other pass that still enthralls me is the Hex River of notorious reputation. It was a grand interlude when, as a small boy, I travelled with my parents between Cape Town and Kimberley in a train without a dining-car. Today I can watch the unfolding of the high landscape with almost the same breathless interest.

There is a conflict of opinion about the origin of the name Hex River. One view is that hex should be hek, meaning gate, as the pass is the gate from the low country to the Karoo. As far back as 1717 records show that the river was called Ekse rivier. But a heks (formerly spelt hex) is a witch in Afrikaans. So many people have been killed in railway accidents on the Hex River pass that a sinister influence seems to lurk over the majestic mountains. During the First World War a troop train was derailed there; eight men of the Kaffrarian Rifles were killed and eighty-nine injured. A stone beacon with the names of the victims stands at the scene of the accident. Again, in 1928, eight were killed when some of the coaches of a passenger train overturned and caught fire. There have been other tragedies since then.

This is the Hex River legend. Elise Savage, daughter of a Huguenot farmer in the valley, was so beautiful that she had many suitors. She favoured one Jean Durand and devised a test for

him. He had to bring her a red flower that grew only on the ledges of the Hex River precipices.

Eagerly the young lover set out on his quest, and after hours of climbing he saw the flower. He had it in his hand when he fell. Some time later a shepherd found the body - and the withered flower.

When Elise Savage realized what she had done she climbed the mountain and threw herself off the ledge where the flower had grown. And now, on every moonlight night, so they say, you can see a white shape on a high point in the mountains.

P. J. Pretorius made the legend the theme of a moving Afrikaans poem:

*As maanlig oor die berge blink
so wit soos daglemier
dan sien jy oor die rotse wink
die heks van Heksrivier.*

CHAPTER 3 “OLD DUTCH MEDICINES”

SOME OF THE STORES DOWN in the village have modern windows, others are the traditional Cape *algemene handelaars*. But all the general dealers stock “Old Dutch Medicines.” It will be a transformed countryside indeed when the last bottle of “Versterk Druppels” is sold, when “Turlington” is no longer in demand, when “Levens Essence” ceases to give instant relief to the troubled stomach.

Some of these remedies are so old that the firms preparing them are unable to give me their origins. A few of the most famous prescriptions have been on sale in the Cape for at least two centuries without the slightest change in the ingredients. I am not at all inclined to sneer at medicines which have relieved the pains of generation after generation of country people.

In the days when doctors were unknown in the platteland every farmer had his *huis-apteek*, a medicine-chest stocked with powerful herbs

gathered and recommended by Bushman and Hottentot servants. There was always a vlym or lancet for bleeding a patient; and the *koppelhoring* (suction horn) served the same purpose. Cobwebs, turpentine or tobacco leaves were used as bandages.

Farmer’s wives cut up potatoes and laid the slices on the forehead to relieve headaches. Powdered chalk was the great poison antidote. Bread mould cured many a festering wound; they little knew that one day it would be called penicillin.

Before the end of the eighteenth century came the Halle or Hallesche medicines, originally imported, but later made up by the Cape Town apothecaries. I think the “Old Dutch Medicines” can trace their descent to both these sources; the Cape buchu, wild garlic and other bulbs and plants; and the almost medieval medicines from Europe.

Halle medicines, advertised in the “Cape Town Gazette” in 1817, included “wonder essence,

Dulcis, Amara, cramp drops and red powder.” They were “put up in boxes for the convenience of country people.” I have also studied a pamphlet in Nederlands, printed in 1859, and describing the remedies obtainable at the Engel Apotheek, 29 Loop Street. Dr. C. F. Juritz was the chemist. The pamphlet was intended as a household medical guide, and it gave symptoms and dosages. It is clear that Dr. Juritz was making up the mixtures that later became “Old Dutch Medicines.” Turlington for chest complaints, Jamaica Gemmer Essens, Dr. Stahl’s Versterkende Druppels - all these were on the list.

Dr. Juritz also announced that he had the original recipe for Napoleon’s Borstpillen, given to him by a friend of the Emperor, and guaranteed to loosen the chest. There was antimonium wine for children; arnica tincture to be applied outwardly to the head and muscles or taken internally with water; asthmatic elixir and various balsams; *bloedstillende druppels*, Cajoputi oil for pains in the limbs, buchu *azyn*, Groene Amara for

stomach ache and Hoffman’s druppels for headache. *Pynstillende druppels*, *zinkings druppels* (own recipe), *koorts druppels* and *oog-water* all speak for themselves.

Testimonials at the end of the pamphlet included one from the great Ovamboland missionary, Dr. C. Hugo Hahn, who praised the eye essence and declared that the inflammation from which he had been suffering during a long journey in the interior had subsided.

At the same period another chemist advertised alum in casks, arsenic, ipecacuanha, valerian, jujubes, paregoric lozenges, coriander seeds and jalap. But the famous Cape mixtures held their own in the face of powerful foreign competition.

About the middle of the last century “Croft’s cures” vied with the older remedies. The name of Croft was a household word in the Cape for many years, for he was a shrewd advertiser in the country newspapers. Croft’s “Tincture of Life” was regarded as a certain specific for snakebite,

horse-sickness, cattle diseases and distemper in dogs.

Unfortunately the medical profession did not share this view, and Croft was denounced as a quack. He defended himself vigorously in the "Cape Argus." Although he held no licence, Croft said, he had practised in the country for thirty-two years and had thus acquired a wider experience than most of those who held diplomas. Out of thousands he had attended, only six had died - and these were all young children. Even more astonishing was his claim that his services were "chiefly gratis." The country people believed in Croft, and he certainly believed in himself.

Some of you may remember a later spell-binder, the celebrated Sequah, who toured the Cape by ox-wagon towards the end of last century. This "wonder doctor" had a retinue of cowboys and a brass-band. Wherever he went he left a trail of human teeth, painlessly extracted while the band drowned the shouts of the victims.

He sold the famous "Sequah Oil and Prairie Flower Mixture," which he described as "a sure cure for every ailment under the sun." The lame hobbled to his shows and some ran home without their crutches. Sequah kept the sticks as trophies. His real name was Stevens, and he died in 1916 in Johannesburg. There was another Sequah using identical methods overseas; his name was Hannaway Rowe, and he never visited South Africa.

Van Riebeeck was the first surgeon to live in the Cape. Others arrived with the Huguenots. Some, like Jean Durand who settled in the Drakenstein valley in 1690, had farms as well - a custom which has survived through the centuries.

Those early surgeons appear to have been handy enough at putting up dislocations. They were fond of prescribing such medicines as cinnamon, crocus, ginger and the wonderful Peruvian bark now known as quinine.

As early as 1713 the first district surgeon was appointed - Daniel Feyl of Stellenbosch. In the middle of the eighteenth century a surgeon, Nicolai Fuchs of Rensburg, was shipwrecked at Mossel Bay. He liked the Cape so much that he stayed on and secured two morgen near the church in the Land of Waveren. His patients claimed that although he was an alien, without rights, he was "an individual whose services were indispensable to the public." Nevertheless, he was ordered by Governor van Plettenberg thirty years later to leave the country.

It was possible in those days for a surgeon to qualify locally if he could satisfy the Company's surgeons that he knew his work. In 1776 a soldier, Montauban of Rotterdam, received his certificate at the Castle. These early surgeons were also barbers., as in Europe.

Lichtenstein met a young physician in practice at Swellendam in 1803. The physician confessed, however, that he had to travel far and wide selling medicines. His ordinary practice would not support him, for he declared: "There is not a

colonist who would not rather be his own physician."

Medical men were allowed to advertise, even in the nineteenth century. Here is an example from an 1817 issue of the "Cape Town Gazette":

"Mr. Shand, Surgeon, Royal Navy, begs most respectfully to acquaint the inhabitants of Stellenbosch and its vicinity that he proposes to establish himself there in the various branches of his Profession. From the experience and practice he has acquired in the service of his country in different parts of the world, he hopes to obtain a small share of public confidence. He is lodging with the Widow Le Guerenne. Night applications will be equally attended to as by day."

A Doctors' Society was formed in 1826, but the young doctors and the men of the old school soon fell out. The committee drew up rules, and country doctors were instructed to visit the gaols daily, attend all floggings, keep registers of cases attended, dispense medicines from government supplies and furnish regular reports. They were

also required to compile notes on climate, prevalent diseases, the bites of venomous creatures and the efficacy of indigenous remedies.

For decades after that, however, there were large districts without doctors. Five thousand people in the Clanwilliam area were without medical aid. The country was ravaged again and again by smallpox, but only those in large centres could be vaccinated. Dr. Cooper of Somerset West complained in 1844 that many women were dying in child-birth, and suggested proper training for midwives.

As late as 1871 the “Cape Monthly Magazine” protested against “inferior men” known as *plattelandse heelmeesters* being allowed to attend the sick. The course favoured by the magazine was an apprenticeship of two years to an apothecary, followed by two years in a hospital.

The first Afrikaner to qualify in medicine overseas was Dr. Johannes Smuts of Paarl. He was born in 1819, took his degrees in Holland in

1843, and died in 1871. Twelve years before his death Dr. Smuts was converted to homeopathic medicine. Homeopaths believe that the most efficient drug to cure a disease is one which will produce the symptoms of that disease in a healthy person. They give the smallest possible doses. The first homeopath had set up in practice in Cape Town in 1857, a Mr. Hugh Eaton who announced that he was following the method originated at Leipzig by Samuel Hahnemann.

The first medical book to be published at the Cape was Dr. Biccard’s “Volksgeneeskunde voor Zuid Afrika” in 1866. The first issue of the “Medical Journal” appeared eighteen years later.

There were only 126 licensed doctors in the Cape Colony in 1874, and 148 qualified druggists. Five years later the first South African woman doctor was placed on the register - Miss Jane Waterston of honoured memory.

An old doctor who practised in the country in the 'eighties of last century once told me that in those days there were no bad debts. In the village

he charged five shillings a visit by day and ten shillings at night. When he went out to the farms in his Cape cart, the rate was three shillings a mile. And as soon as he had treated a patient, the farmer would go at once to his wagon-box and count out the fee in golden sovereigns.

Today there are still many country doctors who would not change places with any city specialist. I know one genial medical practitioner in a remote Cape district who sums up his life candidly, like this:

“I am a glorified taxi-driver, and I often have to go a hundred miles to see a patient. I am spending a fortnight in town, and already I am ready to return to my solitude. I like beer, food and hunting. The country is ideal for anyone with my indolent nature.”

Doctors still extract teeth in the lonely districts of the Cape, but for some reason most of them dislike this work and refuse to fill cavities. Thus

the itinerant dentist has always been a popular visitor deep in the platteland.

Not long ago I was talking to a man who travelled from dorp to dorp by post-cart in the ‘eighties of last century with the tools of the dentist’s profession. He had served an apprenticeship of five years to a leading Cape Town dentist - the only available training at that period. Then, at the age of nineteen, he had borrowed enough money to buy an outfit of his own and set off through the old Cape Colony.

“I had a happy time,” he recalled. “The doctors were friendly. I carried chloroform and large retorts of nitrous oxide; sometimes the local doctor would give the anaesthetic, often I gave it unaided: Many doctors welcomed me because I was able to assist them at operations. I had no degrees or other qualifications, but I was a very good dentist.”

He hired a bedroom and sitting-room at each hotel and set up his drilling machine. This was operated by foot. He carried a large stock of porcelain

teeth, vulcanite and rubber, and charged twenty-five guineas for a full set. During his first month (at Mossel Bay) he made £100: Doctors and dentists were allowed to advertise, so that every village knew when he would arrive. He still has his bag of instruments, and he told me that he could still use them if anyone cared to put him to the test. Such was the early career of a man who afterwards became famous in another field of enterprise - Mr. C. W. H. Kohler, founder of the modern Cape wine industry.

In places so remote that even the itinerant dentist never called, missionaries did their best to relieve toothache. The Rev. Heinrich Kling of Steinkopf was a natural dentist with a deft touch which had to be seen to be believed - so one of his patients assured me. When he examined a tooth he knew instinctively what instrument would be required; and without a falter he would draw the aching tooth. Kling was also a wise herbalist. During his years in retirement at Wolseley he filled a loft with herbs gathered on the mountains. His book

on the subject, "Die Sieke Trooster," is rare and valuable nowadays.

Herbalists have always flourished in the Cape. The *bossie dokter* was at work before Van Riebeeck arrived; and he is still willing to prescribe for almost any ailment. Often enough he is successful, for among the herbs and plants of the veld are some with genuine curative powers.

Dr. L. Pappe, the official Cape botanist, appears to have been the first to devote a pamphlet to the medical properties of Cape plants. It was published in 1850, price two shillings; and today it is so rare that many collectors would pay three guineas for a copy. Marloth and others have added considerably to Pappe's research, but there are probably still many medical secrets of the veld awaiting discovery.

A story that impressed me was related by a retired police sergeant who was at Nieuwoudtville in 1918, during the devastating influenza epidemic. In the absence of a doctor, the sergeant went

round treating 'flu victims with an infusion of tea made from the Sandoleanhout (or Bastoleanhout), a bush that grows in many parts of the Cape.

Intense sweating is produced by this drink. The sergeant completed his cures by doses of ammoniated tincture of quinine. No one died in Nieuwoudtville, though there were scores of deaths at Calvinia and Van Rhynsdorp.

It was a plague indeed, that October epidemic. Many farmers had gone to Cape Town for the wool sales; they returned home in the grip of the fever and spread the infection. There were lonely farms on which every human being perished. Many isolated people could not hope for skilled medical attention. Stores closed in the villages, branch railways shut down.

No wonder the desperate country folk resorted to old remedies. They hung up wild garlic in their rooms, wore it round their necks, ate the bulbs raw or boiled them in milk.

The origin of wild garlic as a medicine makes the queerest story of all. This knowledge came from the baboons. Sick baboons have often been observed burrowing for wild garlic. Whole troops were seen during the 1918 epidemic, staggering out of their mountain fastnesses in search of garlic. They, too, suffered heavy casualties. Nevertheless, many a farmer will tell you that he owes his life to wild garlic.

Another baboon remedy which is followed faithfully in the platteland is an infusion of willow leaves for rheumatism. Baboons suffer from rheumatism, and farmers noticed their pet baboons gorging on these leaves. A world-famous drug for relieving pain is derived from the same source; but in the country, willow leaves are regarded by some as a lasting cure.

Watercress is a plant with a great medicinal reputation in those parts of the Cape where it flourishes. It has iron and vitamins, of course, and it is used for asthma and other chest complaints, whooping cough and colds. They tell the tale in Riversdale of a man in the last stages

of tuberculosis who felt an urge to eat watercress. After a few months of this diet he made a complete recovery.

Wild sorrel, the wayside plant, replaces vinegar in many country households. This is the same plant that was given to scurvy stricken sailors in Dutch East India Company's days. The leaves, which contain oxalic acid, are often used for cleaning brass.

Leaves of Kruidjie (or Truidjie) roer my nie, in spite of the unpleasant odour, yield a decoction which is taken as a gargle or applied to skin diseases. Another favourite gargle is derived from the leaves of the Hottentot fig; and this antiseptic juice also makes a lotion for burns.

Dyspepsia cures and remedies for stomach-ache are plentiful. The grey-green, resinous leaves of the renosterbos, infused with brandy, form a stimulating bitters. Powder the tops, and you have the old-fashioned aperient for children. Then there is the kankerbos, which has failed to provide a cure for cancer. Mrs. Dijkman, in her

early Afrikaans cookery book ("Kook, Koek en Resepten Boek, 1898") advised the silvery kankerbos leaves for ordinary stomach troubles. Long before that Thunberg the botanist recorded that the leaves, dried and powdered, were applied to sore eyes..

Koekmakranka-sopie is still a popular farm remedy for stomach-ache. (All mixtures blended with brandy appear to retain their charm.) The sweet-scented flowers appear in autumn. They are steeped in boiling water, and when diluted the liquid is given to babies with teething troubles. Koekmakranka skin is applied to boils to bring them to a head; it is also useful for bruises and insect-bites. *Wildeals* (wormwood) has restored many a lost appetite.

Some asthmatics claim that they have found relief by smoking dried stinkblaar (*Datura Stramonium*) leaves. This is a weed which must be treated with respect, however, for two seeds are enough to kill a child and three may finish an adult. Generations of South African schoolboys have known these seeds as *malpitte* because of

the queer behaviour and delirium they produce. The poison is the alkaloid atropa belladonna. A sixteen-year-old boy at King William's Town swallowed a few seeds to avoid attending school and died within twenty-four hours. Stinkblaar poultice is an old country remedy for rheumatism, and that is harmless enough.

Chest complaints are often treated with a dagga tincture, or *geelblommetjie* tea (Cape saffron) or protea syrup. *Tandpynwortel*, also known as water parsnip, is chewed to relieve toothache. For a headache you make a poultice of leaves of the castor-oil plant. The tiny fruit of the kissieblaar weed, pounded to a pulp, is applied to sores, while a prickly pear leaf poultice is relied upon to clear up ulcers.

Scorpion stings are rarely fatal unless the victim is a young child or older person in feeble health. A farmer who once received a painful scorpion sting told me that he called in a neighbour for advice. The neighbour unscrewed the stem of his pipe and poured the nicotine juice on to the sting. Pain and swelling disappeared almost immediately.

Ammonia, petrol or paraffin are the common farm remedies when the modern antivenin is not available. I have also heard of a six-year-old child, stung in the finger, whose parents plunged the finger into a fresh hen's egg and made the child keep it there for thirty minutes. The egg is reported to have turned blue but the child suffered no pain or ill-effects.

Most famous of all the Cape veld remedies are buchu and bitter aloes. These are valuable products indeed, not merely the medicines of platteland tantes but commodities in great demand overseas. And there is bush tea.

If my five acres were in the Cedarberg mountains I would grow bush tea and stand a chance of selling the crop for £1,000 a year. I was fascinated by what I saw and heard of bush tea in the Cedarberg.

Bush tea is often confused with buchu. It is, of course, an entirely different plant - a legume. You hear it called rooi bos, *heuning tee*, *stekel tee*,

boer tee; there are a number of varieties. The Cedarberg species is known to scientists as “*cyclopia vogelii* harv.” It is mentioned in the Bible (Ecclesiastes: Chapter 24, Verse 15): “I give a sweet smell like cinnamon and aspalathus.” Bush tea belongs to the genus *aspalathus*.

The main virtue of bush tea lies in the fact that you can stew it, take it in large quantities and suffer no ill effects. It contains no tannin, no alkaloids. Thus it does not upset people suffering from heart trouble, dyspepsia or insomnia. Make it as strong as you like. Try it iced with a slice of lemon. Drink gallons of hot bush tea with impunity. It increases the appetite, and some declare that it relieves chronic catarrh and asthma.

Dr. Peter Le Frans Nortier is the man behind the bush tea boom in the Clanwilliam district. This country doctor, born and brought up on a farm, is a lover of the soil. One of the first Rhodes scholars, he studied medicine at Pembroke College, Oxford, and at Liverpool. Late in 1917; after war service, he set up in practice at Clanwilliam.

A few miles outside the town Dr. Nortier started an experimental farm. He grew mangos and avocados on the banks of the Olifant's river, and developed a seedless orange that became famous. There I met him in his cool rondavel; a friendly, scientific man with a pearl-buttoned waistcoat and corduroy trousers, a man equally familiar with stethoscopes and spades.

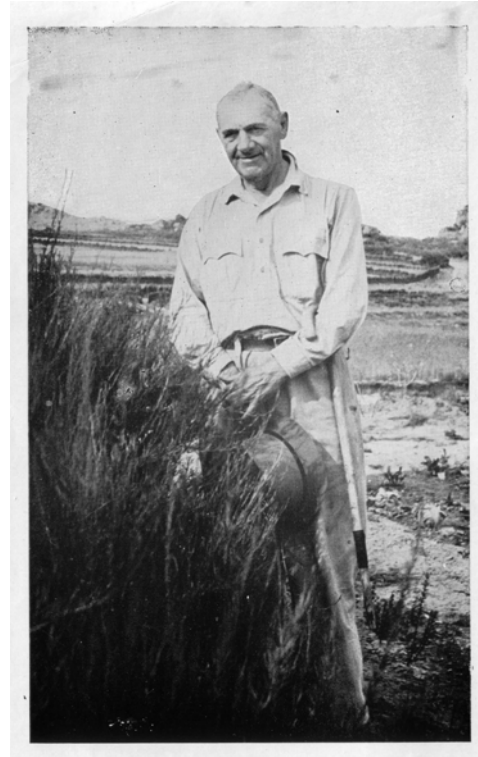
Nearly twenty years ago Dr. Nortier decided to find out whether the wild bush tea could be cultivated. Bush tea had always found a market in the Cape. One of my books, “Everyday Life in the Cape Colony,” published in 1902, remarks: “In most of the stores bush tea can be bought. It costs sixpence a pound, looks like the clippings of a privet hedge, including the twigs, and is said to be a tonic.” The demand was increasing in 1930, and all the bush tea was being collected more or less painfully by the same bands of coloured people who brought in the buchu.

Dr. Nortier immediately encountered a seed problem. He begged the farmers to bring him seed, but no one collected it. When he offered to

pay for it an aged Hottentot woman came again and again, receiving a shilling for each match-box filled with seed. Evidently she had a large supply, and at last the doctor learnt the secret.

The ants of the district collect rooibos seeds and store them underground. The old woman had been robbing the ants. Little did she imagine that within ten years the price of a match-box of seed would rise from a shilling to £5; the most expensive vegetable seed in the world at £80 a pound. The scarcity is caused by the dispersal of the seeds as soon as the pods crack. Bush tea grows in such lonely places that it is hard to find and hard to be there at the right moment for seed collecting.

Dr. Nortier planted the seeds on Klein Kliphuis farm, six miles up the Pakhuis Pass. The farm is owned by Mr. W. T. Riordan, a retired magistrate; and the terraced garden close to the road, with its oranges and strawberries, is one of the sights of the district. From the height of two thousand feet you have a view of the sweltering Olifant's river valley without feeling the heat.



Mr. W. T. Riordan with his record bush tea plant on the farm Klein Kliphuis.

At first the tough seeds would not germinate. Dr. Nortier solved this problem by scarifying the seeds. That gave results that were eighty per cent successful. The next snag came when the tiny bushes were transplanted. This process must coincide with the rains; you must plant just after heavy rain at a time when more rain is due. The farmer who secures a fifty per cent “strike” regards himself as lucky.

The seed is sown in January and the seedlings are transplanted when about one foot in height in June. Under ordinary field conditions there should be a small crop in the second year, a reasonable crop in the third, and large crops during the fourth and fifth years. The life of the cultivated plant is about seven years. Wild plants live much longer.

Mr. Riordan settled on his farm in 1943, and when I visited him four years later he had placed four morgen of his nine hundred morgen under bush tea. The income from this small area was so satisfactory that Mr. Riordan's son (a mining engineer in Johannesburg) abandoned gold in favour of the more profitable bush tea.

Although the whole process is still in the experimental stage, one farm in the Clanwilliam area has already yielded a £8,000 crop. The crop is collected in February and each bush should yield, on an average, about one pound of dried tea. Mr. Riordan secured ten lbs, from one huge bush. It grew to six feet in height, but although he and his son studied this monster carefully, they never discovered the reason.

From the point of view of scientific cultivation bush tea is still in its infancy. No irrigation is necessary. Nothing is yet known about fertilisation possibilities. The seed grows in poor sandy soil and flourishes where even rye will not grow. Even the botanical classification of the different bush teas has never been done properly.

When picked the green tea is put through a chaff-cutting machine, then bruised with wooden mallets, sprinkled with water and left in heaps to ferment. Next day it is sun-dried on a cement floor, when it loses nearly half its weight. The Cedarberg tea flower is small and yellow and the leaves are red when cured - the familiar popular rooibos of

the grocer's shop. Another variety gives a black leaf, which appears to have a future from the blending point of view. Probably the most delicate flavour of all is provided by a bush tea with a small red flower, found only on the highest Cedarberg peaks.

Mr. Riordan bought his farm "for a song," as he says, in 1918 when he was stationed at Clanwilliam as magistrate's clerk. For years a tenant paid £1 a month for the property which is now yielding a comfortable income.

Buck, hares, ants and a borer worm are the enemies of the bush tea plant. Mr. Riordan considers that the hare does most damage, and is fencing against it. He has devised a method of growing wheat between the rows of tea as a unique windbreak.

At one time it looked as though bush tea would be exterminated in the Cedarberg, for goats were grazing on it - and goats have eradicated many a useful plant in many parts of the world. Fortunately the wild bush tea survives mountain fires;

the stump sprouts again. Cultivated bush tea, on the other hand, is killed by fire.

Bush tea is popular in the fashionable cafes of the United States. They call it "Kaffir tea" over there; it is sold at seven shillings and sixpence a pound, and a cup in a cafe costs two or three shillings.

Some people find the "wild" flavour of bush tea a little startling. The people who grow it know how to brew it, and I am glad that I had my first cup of bush tea in the inspiring atmosphere of the Cedarberg mountains. At the end of a day's hunting it seemed a magnificent drink.

This is the Cedarberg way with bush tea. Boil the water and pour one cup over the leaves. Let it stand for several minutes, drain off the water, then fill the pot with boiling water and allow it to infuse for fifteen minutes. Put it on the stove and bring it to the boil as often as you like. You may blend bush tea with China or Ceylon if you wish, but this is purely an economy measure in the cities. The bush tea connoisseur, way up in the mountains, will not tolerate a blend.

Buchu was the ancient medicine of all the native races which found the green shrubs growing on their mountains. It belongs to the orange family, but the volatile oil of the leaves has a peppermint odour.

Coloured men, women and children go out buchu gathering in the mountains. There is a colony of these buchu people at Algeria, the forest station in the Cedarberg. Many of them have done nothing else all their lives; for although buchu has known booms and slumps, the heavy sacks of leaves always provide a living.

The gatherers use their noses as well as their eyes. Lonely kloofs yield the largest harvests. (Remember the story of the ladder?) After clearing a patch, they note the spot and return after two years for another picking.

Finest of all the many buchu varieties is the dark green *rondeblaar* from the Cedarberg and Piketberg. The long (or oval) leaf, also known as steenbok buchu, comes mainly from the Tulbagh

and Swellendam areas. It can be identified in winter by the small white flower. There is also the strongly-scented river buchu, oblong in shape, and found near watercourses.

In the Cedarberg, donkeys are used to carry the bales of buchu. Elsewhere sacks weighing up to a hundred pounds are carried by the men. The bushes are hung up in the shade to dry, for the leaves would lose their colour in fierce sunlight. After eight to fourteen days the leaves fall off the stalks and the buchu is ready for sale to the nearest dealer. Rain is a disaster during the drying process, for wet leaves become white and valueless.

Scientists have named the buchu varieties according to their scents - Barosma (heavy), Diosma (divine), Agathosma (good) and so on. Nature appears to have provided the leaves with these aromatic oils as a protection against grazing animals and insects.

Before 1910 buchu fetched only a few pence a pound. Then the United States chemists became

aware of it, and during the 1914-18 war the price rocketed to 12s. 6d. a pound - only to slump to 5s. overnight. All through the 1939-45 war buchu fetched a steady 3s., and the price has risen since then. Buchu brings dollars and sterling to the Union - £20,000 a year from the United States and £16,000 from Britain.

I believe the first farmer to cultivate buchu was the Versfeld who settled on top of Piketberg mountain in the 'sixties of last century and built the famous old figure eight road to the summit. Roughly three-quarters of the whole crop nowadays is still collected in the remote mountains. The gatherers also bring in ripe seed buds, which fetch up to twenty shillings a pound; and farmers with suitable mountain slopes plant out the seeds in April or May.

Buchu was coming up well at Avalon, on the steep mountainside above Tulbagh, last time I was there. Murrough Nesbitt, as I have said before, rode beside me on his pony. He pointed down the valley to another buchu farm where the owner had just reaped a crop worth nearly

£5,000. And he told me how the pioneer buchu farmer in the valley, fearing competition, had planted his buchu secretly - little knowing that his neighbours were watching every step in the process.

About half the Cape buchu crop goes into buchu brandy and medicines made in South Africa. Buchu is such a universal medicine on the farms that it is difficult to find a complaint for which it is not used. According to the British Pharmacopoeia it has a slightly diuretic action, inferior to that of other drugs. American chemists use it as a cure for "hangovers." The farmer's wife in the Cape applies buchu vinegar to bruises and sprains, makes buchu tea for kidney and bladder disorders, and swears by buchu brandy for colds, influenza and stomach trouble. There is so much alcohol in some buchu medicines that the country storekeeper has to ration his coloured customers. It is not only the buchu they are after.

Finally there are the bitter aloes, the flame-coloured spikes that grow wild along many a road. Aloe Ferox is cultivated by many farmers in

the Riversdale district. For a century and a half the dried juice (which looks like glue and tastes repulsive) has been shipped to Britain.

For this juice holds the purgative aloin, and it will probably remain in demand as long as laxatives are sold. Casual labourers flock to Albertinia during the tapping season, for nowhere else can they make so much money. Tappers, including many coloured women, earn twenty-five shillings or more a day.

I told you about the baboons that dosed themselves with wild garlic. Aloes also attract the animals. Buck nibble the thick leaves. Birds and bees appear to recognise its medicinal value. The aloe has a longer record than the oldest of "Old Dutch Medicines."

CHAPTER 4

COUNTRY HOSPITALITY

COUNTRY AIR GIVES ME an appetite which has often to be curbed. And here on my stoep nothing pleases me more than the wine of the country and the traditional farm food. I say after much

thought, and despite foreign experience, that the old Cape cookery at its best can stand up to some of the world's finest dishes.

Perhaps it is because my home is in the Cape. Nevertheless, I do not think my palate has led me far astray. The meals I remember with most pleasure are those I have enjoyed within sight of the Cape mountains.

I was listening not long ago to an aged wine farmer describing the land of plenty in the Drakenstein valley where he had spent most of his life. "Those farmers and their families were Nature's aristocrats," he declared. "Every evening their tables were spread for many times the number in their households; almost every evening they entertained people they had never seen before. They did not get much for their wine or fruit. The oranges went to Cape Town in large, square baskets on ox-wagons and fetched two shillings a hundred. Yet nothing could be more delightful than the hospitality of the old Cape countryside before the days of motor-cars."

Farm labourers (went on the old farmer) were better-nourished in those days. They earned a shilling a day and their food. Wine farmers slaughtered sheep and cattle and made their own bread, long loaves baked in ovens sealed with clay. A labourer's slice was four fingers thick. Salt snoek was the breakfast dish, with meat in the middle of the day and more fish at night.

That was the time when every farmer made three liqueurs for household use - Jan Groentjie (peppermint), aniseed and Van der Hum. They were known as "the green, the white and the brown," and the guest had to taste all three before he departed.

Probably the finest wine ever made in the Cape was the sweet red wine they kept in small casks on top of the large vats in the cellars. After a quarter of a century this wine became syrupy and valuable in sickness. It warmed the whole body as you drank it. No doubt some of these casks survive, but you will not find them easily.

The Hugos of Brandwacht, in the Worcester district, had a famous wine of this type. It was laid down by Jacobus Francois Hugo (known as "Oom Koos Mosterdpotjie" because of his fondness for mustard) in 1796. The casks were replenished from time to time; but there was still a little of the original wine left when samples were sent to a Paris exhibition in 1878 and gained a bronze medal.

Bismarck, the "Iron Chancellor" of Germany, received several bottles of this wine on his seventieth birthday. He liked it so much that he secured a further supply. When the Crown Prince was ill in 1882, suffering from a sore throat, Bismarck sent him a bottle of Hugo's wine; and the Crown Prince found that it comforted his throat.

Wines of that age are seldom drinkable to-day, but they have a marvellous aroma. Major Piet van der Byl, M.P., has some very old wine in his cellar at Fairfield in the Caledon district. His most venerable bottle was laid down by an ancestor in 1777. And his grandmother made several bottles

of Van der Hum every year, following different recipes. He opened one bottled in 1865 a few years ago and was captivated by the mellow graciousness of the liqueur.

Here and there a stubborn wine farmer clings to the *trapbalie* and has his grapes pressed by human feet. Machinery does a quicker job, but old-fashioned methods often pay in the wine industry and I would be the last to denounce such a picturesque scene as the tramping out of the grape juice. Some experts say, too, that the modern “eggrapoir” presses the stalks and pips too hard, and gives the wine an acid flavour.

They sang as they walked round the *trapbalie* - the great vat into which the baskets of grapes were thrown. It looked primitive, but that was once the method in all the great wine countries and memorable vintages were pressed in that way.

Young wine, not matured but about six months' old, is known as *Vaaljapie*. This is the favourite everyday drink of the Cape coloured farm labourer; and in some districts it is difficult to get

the heavy work of harvesting or shearing done without regular tots of *Vaaljapie*. It takes its name from its tawny colour; though some varieties are red. *Vaaljapie* can be a sound and refreshing drink, in strict moderation. But a raw *Vaaljapie*, undiluted with water, has unpleasant effects.

The wine of the Cape which gives me greatest pleasure is one which I can buy only when I have a railway dinner. It is the dry red wine of Zonnebloem, near Simondium, made by John de Villiers who was killed in a motor accident in 1948. John de Villiers knew that the Cape soil and climate favour red wines rather than white. He approached his task with a scientific mind and within a few years he was taking all the important prizes at the Paarl wine show. That young man was on his way towards the production of a wine that would have stood up to many a French burgundy. I hope that his secret has not been lost, for there is inspiration in a glass of Zonnebloem.

Wine and cookery go together. In a previous book, "Tavern of the Seas," I recalled Hildagonda Duckitt's grand books on Cape cookery and her fondness for wine in her recipes. She was the pioneer in this literary field. Her "Hilda's Where is It?", a recipe book of Cape, Indian and Malay dishes, first appeared in the 'eighties of last century.

Soon afterwards, however, came the earliest Afrikaans effort - "*Kook, Koek en Resepten Boek*" by Mrs. Dijkman. It was printed by the Patriot Press in Paarl, and was followed in 1904 by an English edition. Mrs. Dijkman based her work on a book in Nederlands, "*Aaltjie, de Zuinige Keukenmeid*," which was the standard work in country kitchens during the latter half of last century.

The peculiar merit of Mrs. Dijkman's book is to be found in an appendix in which she preserved for posterity a number of old and little-known household medical remedies. She explained in her preface: "It is not my intention to play the doctor or to deprive him of his dues, but simply to be of

help while he is being called. The good, kind doctor always found what I had done in his absence to be the correct thing. This gave me courage."

Mrs. Dijkman's remedies and notes on invalid cookery were praised by the late Dr. C. Louis Leipoldt. He did not like her ordinary recipes so much, however, but preferred the authentic Cape *skottels* and *bredies* of Hilda Duckitt's books.

This century's authority on Cape dishes is Jeanette van Duyn (Mrs. H. M. Slade), who is known in every corner of South Africa as a demonstrator. Born in Porterville (Cape), she first became a typist and then joined the staff of the Transvaal "Agricultural Journal." At this time she knew little about cooking; but she had to provide recipes for her journal and she tested each one in her own kitchen before printing it.

Her work was noticed by General Louis Botha, and at his suggestion she was sent to universities in London, Canada and the United States at government expense to qualify as a dietician. This

was money well spent, for in later years Jeanette van Duyn was able to solve many of the South African country housewife's problems..

Jeanette van Duyn demonstrated the old Cape recipes at Wembley. When one of the ostriches there laid an egg, she was able to bake a cake and prepare *melkert* and *poffertjies* for Queen Mary and her ladies-in-waiting. Jeanette also made sosaties, bredies and bobotie, served with maize-rice. Queen Mary took samples and a recipe for *koesisters* away with her.

“Miss van der Hum” is a nickname Jeanette earned because of her weakness for a dash of the liqueur in some of her sweet recipes. She has added considerably to the range of Cape cookery. Watermelon toffee is among her own creations. At a period when most of the railway chefs were foreigners, she gave special lectures on the preparation of Cape dishes. Her cookery books have done much to revive this art in South African households.

Bobotie is an ancient dish, and Dr. Leipoldt once told me that he had discovered something very like bobotie in a collection of recipes dated 300 A.D.

Mrs. Dijkman made her bobotie from minced meat (cooked or raw), bread, butter, onion, milk, pounded almonds, lemon juice, eggs, curry powder and a small bunch of orange leaves. The mixture was baked and served with boiled rice. Medieval recipes do include a similar dish, but saffron was used instead of curry powder.

One dish brought to the Cape by prisoners who had served their sentences in Dutch men-o'-war, was called “wentel jeeffjes.” It consists of bread soaked in milk and eggs and fried - rich and rare fare for men who were little better than galley slaves.

Crawfish usually appears cold nowadays, with mayonnaise. Dr. Leipoldt preferred the method of taking everything out of the shell, pounding and stewing it with sherry, and then replacing it in the shell and pouring a curried egg sauce over

the rich flesh. Mrs. Dijkman served her crawfish baked, with breadcrumbs. Both these methods produce dishes of finer flavour than any mayonnaise.

Sweet potatoes are revered in the platteland to a degree unknown in the towns. For centuries the “patat” has ripened in patches of dark green vegetation towards the end of June. In the wheat belt the standard winter breakfast consists of sweet potatoes, boiled snoek and coffee.

They boil sweet potatoes in their skins on the farms. You can fry them in boiling fat for a change; or serve them chipped with cinnamon sauce; or soak them in brine and embody them in a curry. A sweet potato salad with pickled fish is typical of the Cape cuisine.

Three varieties are grown in the Western Province. Largest of all is the “white,” which runs up to nearly thirty pounds. The Port Natal patat is smaller, and has a more subtle flavour. Very sweet and yellow is the borrie patat.

Van Riebeeck had the patat (but not the ordinary Irish potato) planted in the Company’s garden very soon after his arrival. As early as 1655 this resolution was passed: “So too shall ‘Pattat-tissen’ be planted on Robben Island, in order to determine if the dry soil will not allow them to grow better than they do here, as we find to our astonishment that they are of an extraordinarily excellent kind, each weighing as much as four or five pounds, wherefore all diligence must be applied to their further cultivation.” Van Riebeeck secured the patat from Java.

The patat, of course, belongs to an entirely different family from the Irish potato, though both appear to have their origin in America. Irish potatoes were growing in Angola long before they reached the Cape; and even at the end of the eighteenth century the Cape farmers concentrated on sweet potatoes and left the Irish variety to their slaves. It was not until the middle of last century that Irish potatoes became plentiful at the Cape.

Pumpkin is the great standby in the country districts, though as a staple diet it has no great value. Those pumpkins you see ripening on so many roofs are usually boiled to a pulp, mixed with meal, lard and salt, and served with mutton.

Bean soup is a well-known farm dish. Known as *boontjies en mielies*, it is often served as thick as porridge. *Kluitjiesop* is a heavy dumpling soup. They also make thrifty soup embodying the fins, tail, head and backbone of a geelbek with onion, curry powder and lemon leaves as flavouring; and this is accompanied by boiled rice.

Boerewors is another farm product which some still make in the old way. It may be defined as a game sausage dating back years before the Great Trek; a sausage in which the meat has been pounded with a wooden stamper rather than minced.

Modern *boerewors*, which is not to be despised, is usually a mixture of lean beef with pork fat, seasoned with wine or vinegar. It is a dry sausage, made without the addition of water. Sheep-tail fat

may be used instead of pork. On the veld the sausage is grilled. At home it is usually heated in boiling water.

Koesisters are doughnuts of Malay origin, but the derivation of the name is not so easy. Some say that a mother was busy in the kitchen one day when her little daughter asked her what she was making. “*Koek, sustertjie*,” was the reply—hence the name. In the East Indies these doughnuts are dipped in coconut, and the Malays of Cape Town still observe the custom at their weddings.

Cake is not served at morning tea on Boland farms, as a rule. That is the time for the special konfyt called “teewaterkonfyt,” composed of whole fruit such as figs, oranges, nartjies and apricots. During the afternoon come the oblietjies, soetkoekies and melktert. Buckwheat cakes are typical of the Montagu district, for the buckwheat flourishes there. The flour is nearly white and makes a softer, stickier dough than wheat flour. Buckwheat has a delicate cereal flavour.

Coffee is not the only beverage enjoyed on the farms, as some city people imagine. It is customary to serve coffee in bed, at breakfast, after lunch and at four in the afternoon. Tea comes into its own at eleven in the morning, at dinner, and at nine at night.

The coffee varies, as any country traveller will agree: Certainly there are country-dwellers whose stomachs appear to be as strong as coffee-pots; they take it so often and so concentrated that the visitor can only marvel.

Roasted wheat, crushed peas, even peach peels are used to form distinctive blends of which various households are proud. In hard times mealie coffee is the substitute. I have also heard of “ghoo coffee” made from wild almonds. The roasting takes the poisonous element out of them, but the drink is more like cocoa than coffee.

For more than twenty years the great coffee-drinking centre of the Cape was the Afrikaner Koffiehuis in Church-square. It was really the

Dutch Reformed Church Hall, built to serve as Sunday school hall and for church events. But in 1916 a new hall was built elsewhere, and the Koffiehuis restaurant was established. At one period you could see many famous politicians and Afrikaans authors and poets in the Koffiehuis - Langenhoven and other celebrities. There at least the coffee was beyond reproach. The building was demolished in 1938.

Biltong is the most famous food of the veld, and the Cape produces the finest of all biltong - the bird biltong of Namaqualand.

You seldom see it nowadays, for the Namaqua partridge no longer arrives in millions when the spring rains fill the vleis. They use only the breasts. Early this century the trekboers caught the birds in nets and filled barrel after barrel with the dried, salted flesh. It is so tender that it crumbles between the fingers. Partridges in other parts of South Africa do not lend themselves to this treatment, and so the Namaqua partridge

biltong, pale white in colour, remains a local and vanishing delicacy.

The queer name biltong is derived from two Afrikaans words – “boud” (haunch of venison) and “tong” (tongue). Strips of biltong hung up to dry look like tongues.

I have found mention of biltong in books published early last century; but there is an earlier name- “tasalletjies” or “tasaaltjies.” The modern “tasalletjies” are strips of meat, peppered, salted, laid in vinegar, then dried in the wind and finally grilled. Going further back, however, one finds the Portuguese word “tassalho,” meaning “preserved meat. It appears that the first biltong made at the Cape was called by the Portuguese name, which was later embodied in the Afrikaans language.

Biltong, of course, is known by different names in many lands. It is a first cousin of the Canadian pemmican, made from bison; and it is similar to the charqui on which the Chilean army climbs the Andes. Springbok and blesbok make the best

antelope biltong in South Africa. Here is a Voortrekker recipe:

Cut out the shoulders and haunches of the buck and dissect out the muscles carefully. Then prepare the pickle with four gallons of water; put a raw potato in the water and stir in salt until the potato floats. Add a handful of coriander and boil. Remove and stand until cold. Then place the meat in the pickle and allow it to stand for twelve hours. Hang from the rafters in a room where the biltong is in a continual draught.

Much biltong is dried in the sun, but the connoisseur declares that this method robs it of flavour. Properly cured, biltong lasts for decades and matures like wine. I have a record of an auction sale of 1897 biltong, held in 1918. The biltong had become hard as stone and fossilised in appearance. When filed down, it revealed a blood-red interior, the very essence of concentrated nourishment.

South African literature is full of biltong stories, but the most amusing anecdotes I ever heard

were related by that great biltong lover, the late Colonel Deneys Reitz. While serving in the trenches in France during the First World War, he received a parcel of biltong. Reitz kept cutting off strips and munching them until he heard an English officer remark: "What a hog that man is for tobacco."

Reitz also told me of President Kruger's affection for biltong. The president had a large supply hanging from a tree in his garden in Pretoria when the generals met at his house just before the South African War opened.

A grave discussion was in progress when the servant girl thrust her head round the door. "Oubaas!" she called excitedly. "Someone has stolen the biltong!"

The president left the room hurriedly, followed by General Louis Botha, in a desperate effort to catch the thief.

Beef biltong is not in the same class as springbok biltong, though it is a sound product when skilfully prepared. Ostrich biltong is tough and

oily. Nevertheless, thousands of ostriches were killed and turned into biltong during the feather slump in Oudtshoorn and after.

Biltong does not lack medical support. Years ago the leading London hospitals ordered quantities for convalescent patients. The late Dr. C. Louis Leipoldt described to me the tests he had carried out with South African biltong and Canadian pemmican when Shackleton was planning his last Antarctic expedition. The biltong was proved to be more nourishing. Shackleton took hundreds of pounds of biltong south with him.

Dr. Leipoldt treated duodenal ulcers with biltong. He declared that a pound of biltong was equal to three pounds of fresh meat, and that a stick of biltong was sufficient food for a man on a long day's march. Biltong has cured some people who were unable to eat anything else owing to seasickness.

Probably the most convincing recent testimony in favour of biltong is that given by Jimmy McLoughlin, a Scottish soldier who returned from

a German prisoner-of-war camp broken in health. The doctors in Glasgow tried various diets and finally despaired of his life. Jimmy then took his life in his own hands and emigrated to South Africa with his wife and two children.

He settled on the Transvaal farm of “Oom Hans” van Rensburg, and there he first tasted biltong. It saved his life. Jimmy McLoughlin sent parcels of the life-giving biltong to friends in Glasgow; and they thought so highly of it that Jimmy decided to set up in business as a biltong merchant. Recently he was reported to be dividing his time between his family in the Transvaal and the insatiable, biltong-hungry grocers of Glasgow.

It is not generally known, perhaps, that biltong may be served hot. First you heat it on red-hot coals, then pound it with a wooden mallet until the sticks are crushed flat, and fry for five minutes in sheep-tail fat. That makes a crisp and crumbly dish.

Shredded or grated biltong goes well with fried eggs. As a sandwich filling it is excellent. I have

also seen biltong omelette, a clever combination. In 1937 it became illegal to sell game biltong in the Cape Province; the Transvaal and the Orange Free State had already set an example. The ban was necessary. It slowed up a slaughter which had been in progress ever since the modern rifle reached South Africa. It put the “biltong farmer” (also known as the “biltong jackal”) out of business.

All the “biltong farmer” needed to make a comfortable living was a rifle and many cartridges, salt, and a car. He sold biltong and hides; and even the bones of the buck went to a fertiliser factory. These men were exterminating the game of the country. If they were caught exceeding the “bag limit” imposed by their shooting licences they paid £25 fines cheerfully - and went on shooting. When foot-and-mouth disease broke out they were allowed to shoot “unlimited wildebeest”; and they shot thousands and prospered. Some of them have defied the law for more than ten years. One who was caught not long ago was fined £120. He pleaded

that his biltong was beef - but the magistrate knew the difference.

Just as typical as biltong is the country *braaivleisaand*. This form of hospitality is now so widespread that many people have sheltered fire-places built in their gardens; open-air ovens, tables and benches reserved for this special meal.

You do not know how much meat you are capable of eating until you have stood round the long wood fire at a *braaivleis* and grilled your own mutton chop - and then another and another.

Tradition demands wooden plates at a *braaivleis*. You should hold the meat over the flames on a pointed stick, and eat it with your fingers. Boerewors, sosaties, jacket potatoes; all these provide variety. There is sure to be coffee, and the drinks may include anything from whisky to *witblits*.

Among the rare country dishes is eel - not smoked eel from Holland but fresh eel caught in

one of the eastward-flowing rivers and fried or stewed with wine. Mrs. Dijkman does not often recommend wine in the kitchen, but she makes an exception of eels. She also tells you how to serve boiled eels with parsley and butter sauce, and eel pie.

Eels have been found in the vleis of the Cape Flats. They migrate overland in suitable country, and conger eels are sometimes caught by the trawlers on the Agulhas Bank. I have still to see one on a fishmonger's slab.

There are centenarians among eels, running to eight feet in length and a girth of twenty-four inches. Large eels have been caught in the Dwars river, Ceres. For some reason which has never been discovered, eels do not enter west coast rivers. That is where you find the barbel with its hideous whiskers, but with a flavour as delicate as an eel if you have the right recipe.

Truffles, the underground edible fungus which pervade other foods with their fragrance, are found in the dry, northern Cape districts. Some

dogs detect them in cracks in the hard earth. You can boil them and eat them with butter, pepper and salt; but they are at their best when cooked with chicken or spaghetti. Both Mrs. Dijkman and Hilda Duckitt are silent on the subject of snails. Nevertheless, there are edible snails in the Cape. They are not the burgundy snails that are bred so carefully in France for the table; these snails are the ordinary garden snails which appear after rain. Starve them for a week, then boil in flavoured water, extract from the shell and serve with a sauce of chopped garlic, parsley and artichoke fried in butter.

You may complain that snails are not typical of the old Cape cookery. Well, here is a dish that is much older than the white settlement at the Cape, one which every farmer knows. It is tortoise, the geometric tortoise of the Malmesbury district. Many country people firmly believe that because the tortoise grazes on medicinal herbs, its flesh has a special value. They make omelettes from, tortoise eggs, which is harmless enough. But if they go on

eating the tortoise itself at the present rate, the geometric species will certainly become extinct.

Perhaps you would prefer a strip of biltong, or a koesister, to these last dishes on the country menu. I think you are right. Weird dishes are all very well as an experiment, but give me the choice and I shall order *tamatie bredie*.

CHAPTER 5

FLORA CAPENSIS

I AM ASHAMED TO SAY that the only flower within sight of my stoep is a solitary, foreign bougainvillea which is climbing the curved wall near the dam. Though I have a strong preference for almost everything belonging to the Cape, I have still to learn the art of growing Flora Capensis.

The background of botany in the Cape grips me like all the rich legacies of past centuries. But I planned this sanctuary to supply my table; the fruit trees and vines came first. I also have a transplanted oak, much taller than myself, which appears to have taken root successfully. The

trouble about the flowers is that I have been spending too much time with the botanists; I have been listening to their stories instead of cultivating my garden. I have followed in the footsteps of Thunberg and Burchell, and I have brilliant memories of spring in the Darling district and in Namaqualand - but no Cape flowers of my own.

Still, I have seen and heard enough to realise that the Cape is one of the great botanical regions of the globe. Sunlight, the unions of flora of far distant ages, the varied soils of sandy coasts and granite mountains, the moisture and the heat - all these have combined to produce the floral wonderland that staggered early botanists.

I believe the first scientific mention of *Flora Capensis* was due to the visit of a Dutch missionary, Heurnius, who landed at Table Bay on his way to the East more than a decade before the arrival of Van Riebeeck. He collected plants on the slopes of Lion's Rump and sent them to his brother in Leyden. A description of them appear-

ed in "Theophrastus' History of Plants," published in Amsterdam in 1644.

Then there is the strange tale of the Dutch East India ship that was wrecked in 1680 on the Guernsey coast. In spring that year, lilies that the islanders had never seen before grew on the Guernsey coast. Long afterwards they were identified as the nerinas of the Table Mountain ledges. Only then was it proved that the lost ship was carrying bulbs to Holland. The lilies became world famous as "Guernsey lilies," but they belong to the Cape.

Late in the eighteenth century began the era of botanical discovery at the Cape. Governor Tulbagh had been sending specimens to Linnaeus, professor of botany at Upsala University in Sweden and pioneer in the classification of plants. James Andries Auge, who took charge of the Company's garden in 1747 and worked there for many years, made collecting trips into the interior; and Professor Bergius based his "*Plantae Capensis*" on Auge's specimens. But the man who gained the title of "father of Cape botany"

was a pupil of Linnaeus - the Swedish scientist Dr. Carl Peter Thunberg.

Thunberg reached the Cape in 1772 as a surgeon in the Dutch East India Company's service. What a land it must have been for his trained eye and intelligent mind. He spent three years at the Cape, recording faithfully not only the plants but the life of the country; noting the flowers and denouncing corrupt officials almost in the same breath. He was a sympathetic observer among the remote farmers, and his descriptions of their primitive methods would grip any farmer today. In the Lange Kloof, for example, the farmers had no wheeled vehicles; and he watched them carrying manure to their lands in sheepskin sacks. Incidentally, he was an eye-witness of the wreck of the *Jonge Thomas*. Thunberg wrote the only true story of Woltemade's heroism.

Within a few days of Thunberg's arrival, Andrew Sparrman arrived at the Cape. He, too, was a medical man and a Swede; he, too, had been encouraged by Linnaeus to explore this virgin botanical wonderland.

Sparrman and Thunberg made a number of collecting trips together, and Sparrman wrote of these outings: "None but a lover of natural history can imagine what pleasure we enjoyed together among the herbs and flowers. At first almost every day was a rich harvest of the rarest and most beautiful plants; and I had almost said that at every step we made one or more new discoveries. And as I had many Swedish friends, and particularly the great Linnaeus always present in my memory, every duplicate or triplicate of the plants that I gathered gave me a sensible pleasure."

On two long journeys deep into the country, Thunberg was accompanied by an English gardener, Francis Masson of the Royal Garden of Kew. They travelled through Groene Kloof and the Zwartland, visited Saldanha Bay, the "Koud Bokke Veld," "Hexen Rivier" and other well-known places. Masson was also a writer and he recorded the discovery "of many curious plants," and in particular "a large bulbous root which the Dutch call *vergiftboll* - poison bulb; the juice of

which, they say, the Hottentots use as an ingredient to poison their arrows.” He also noted a new palm “of the pith of which the Hottentots make their bread.”

Masson spent ten years at the Cape, leaving only when he feared that an “expected invasion” might cause the loss of his precious collection of living plants. He sent Erica seeds to Kew, and they flourished there. One of his books described the journeys he made with the more famous Thunberg, the other book dealt with new varieties of stapeliae and had ten colour plates.

Thunberg wrote two books on the Cape flora in Latin; but his four-volume work “Travels in Europe, Africa and Asia” was published in London in English.

Not long after Thunberg (in November 1810) came William John Burchell, a highly-skilled botanist and zoologist. His “Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa” was certainly the most valuable and accurate work on the country published up to the end of the first quarter of the

nineteenth century. Many copies were broken up for the beautiful colour plates, Burchell’s own work; so that, today the two volumes are worth £40.

Burchell was a small man, bold and versatile. He had previously spent five years in St. Helena as schoolmaster and botanist in the English East India Company’s service. There he had been jilted by the girl who was coming out to marry him; she married the master of the ship instead. Burchell found solace in his work, and the music of his flute.

He bought a wagon, oxen and stores in Cape Town for £600, and spent four years away from civilisation. Somewhere near Prieska he noticed the thorns protecting certain plants from browsing animals; and he began to evolve the theory of protective form and colouring which Darwin completed. Apart from plants, his greatest discovery was the white rhinoceros.

During the years that Thunberg and Burchell were collecting at the Cape, hot-houses and

conservatories in Europe were filled with Cape Flowers. Our heaths and proteas were prized above all the known flowers of the earth; and the fashion changed only when the gorgeous tropical orchids arrived.

But for sixty years the “Cape house” reigned supreme in the gardens of the wealthy. Hybrid gladioli, nemesias, even the Hottentot fig, were all startling novelties.

Yet it is no wonder that the flower-lovers of Europe found the new arrivals so exciting. Those who collected at the Cape made their selections in the world’s richest field. They gazed upon hundreds of species of heaths and ericas; the magnificent proteas in widely differing forms; the huge pea family in the shape of trees, herbs and shrubs; family after family in a profusion unknown in Europe. On Table Mountain alone there are two thousand species of wild flowers.

Though the orchids ousted the Cape flowers in Europe more than a century ago, Cape heaths have come into their own again recently in distant

lands. They are grown by the acre in California for the cut-flower trade. Americans visit the Cape to find flame lilies, proteas and daisies for their own market; Australia grows Cape bulbs in huge quantities; and in England glass houses are devoted to Karoo succulent plants, which are sold in the bazaars.

Fashions in flowers, as I have said, are liable to change as suddenly as the demand for ostrich feathers. In the ’nineties of last century a newspaper held a competition to select South Africa’s national flower by popular vote. An overwhelming majority favoured the *sewe-jaartjie*, the white everlasting that grows most abundantly on the mountain slopes round Elim.

For many years these flowers brought a regular income to the coloured people of the Elim mission - as much as £2,000 in a good year. They were exported for use in funeral wreaths and as church decorations. Crimson everlastings are also found on the Western Province mountains; but the white flowers were gathered for export.

The mission people selected full blooms at a time when the veld was dry, from September to the end of December. These flowers, with their curved petals, are so light that it takes two thousand to balance a one pound weight - and the gatherers received one shilling a pound for them. They plucked them carefully, leaving the plants uninjured; sorted and packed them; all for about sixpence a thousand. Once the price dropped as low as four pence, and it went up to one and sixpence.

Two thousand million everlastings, it is estimated, were sent away from Elim and Napier while the trade lasted. It came to an end during the depression in the early nineteen-thirties. Some countries stopped the importation of such luxuries as flowers; others made artificial everlastings from paper. Russia was an important customer before 1914, but not after the revolution.

One of the characters in the everlasting trade was Daniel Carse, son of an 1820 settler, who was so poor as a young man that he worked on a farm in

the Stanford district for sixpence a day. His father had taught him tanning, however, and Carse saved a little money by making riems and selling them in Caledon.

At last Carse was able to buy a farm of five hundred morgen for £75. (Today it is valued at about £20,000). On the border of his farm he observed a mountain where *sewejaartjies* grew profusely. His friends thought he was mad when he bought the mountain; but the flowers added to the fortune he was making. When he died in 1942 at the age of eighty-eight, Carse was worth £75,000.

Nowadays the everlastings are still collected, in much smaller numbers, for old-fashioned people in Cape villages who like to have pillows and mattresses stuffed with the petals. It means pulling off the petals by hand. Some declare that a mattress of everlastings will cure insomnia, and the flowers do make a cool filling material. But the people of Elim still mourn their lost markets overseas.

Chincherinchees are finding their way abroad again. Between the wars Cape Town florists shipped large consignments in cold storage to England, and found a ready market there during the winter. Some sent before Christmas were still in good condition at Easter, and were used as church decorations. The trade was worth £11,000 a year until the war stopped it.

“Chinks” grow only in the Western Province. As far back as 1794 Thunberg, the Swedish botanist, described them. “Tinterinties,” he said, “is a name given to a species of ornithogalum with a white flower, from the sound it produces when two stalks of it are rubbed together.” I have also seen the name spelt “chinkering ching.” The Afrikaans name is equally picturesque - *viooltjies* (little violin). Homer referred to the same species when he mentioned “the lilylike sound of the Cicada.”

The finest “chinks” for export are the later ones, known as the Darling variety. Mr. T. Versfeld of

the famous farm Slangkop, noted for spring flowers, cultivates “chinks” for export and has received huge orders from the United States. Mrs. Versfeld sent “chinks” to the Queen; and the Queen wrote to her some time later saying that the flowers from Slangkop were a “white brilliance” at Sandringham.

New York flower shops sell “chinks” at the equivalent of eight pence each. They call it “Africa Star of Bethlehem” and Americans find a special romantic glamour about the flower which still looks fresh after a sea passage of seven thousand miles. Some are shipped with waxed ends. On arrival the wax is removed and the stalks are placed in tepid water. After three days the fists of tight buds open, and the white and fragile flowers with delicate yellow centres appear on the long chartreuse stems.

Horses and other farm animals instinctively avoid the “chink” unless no other grazing is available. The plant, especially the seeds, contains a poison which is often fatal.

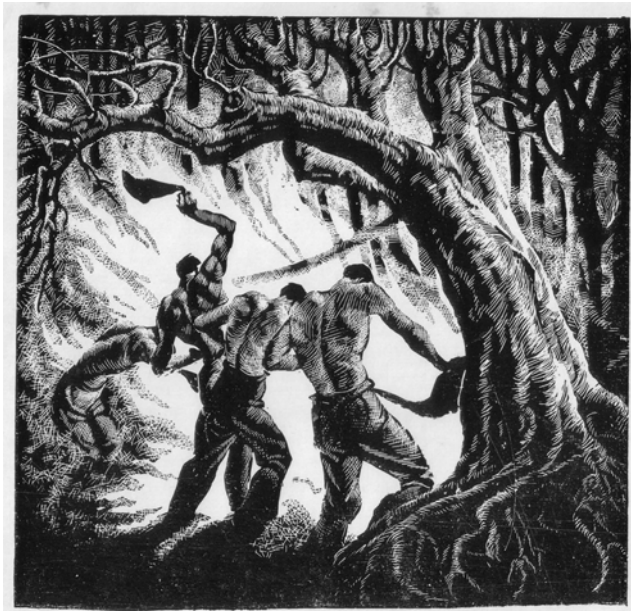
Some of the Cape flowers are almost extinct. There are proteas that grow wild only in certain limited areas; ruthless pickers and veld fires have played havoc with them. Among the rarest of all is the Marsh Rose.

Mr. Hilbert Werner, Curator of Kirstenbosch, told me the story of the Marsh Rose. A mountaineer found a small group of the deep ruby red blooms growing on a remote peak above Kleinmond. Previously he had seen a group on one other peak. Both groups were menaced by fires; and as these were probably the last of the species in the wild state, the mountaineer collected eight specimens and replanted them on a farm in the district. He also gave Mr. Werner seventeen seeds, so that if the Marsh Rose fails to survive in its natural surroundings the species may not become extinct.³

³ The mountaineer was Mr. D. H. Woods, who has given me great assistance in checking the facts in this chapter and the mountaineering section. In August 1949 Mr. Werner reported that two of the seeds given to him by Mr. Woods had germinated.

Another protea which was thought to be in danger some time ago was the “Blushing Bride” (*Serruria florida*), which has its only home in Assegaiboskloof, five miles from Franschhoek. Many believed that the species had been wiped out after a devastating mountain fire about six years ago. To the delight of botanists, however, the “Blushing Bride” has reappeared in the kloof fairly recently in great profusion. This delicate shrub has pink flowers, the colour of a blush. According to Franschhoek custom, a man takes off his hat when he encounters the “Blushing Bride.”

Origins of the Cape flowers are a deep mystery. Generally speaking, they are different from the flora of the rest of the Union and the rest of Africa. You have to go to Western Australia to find a clear relationship.



“Some of the Cape Flowers are almost extinct... The ‘Blushing Bride’ was almost wiped out by a devastating fire, but to the delight of Botanists it has reappeared.

There is a “land bridge” theory, the Wegener theory of continents that drifted apart; but that is far from satisfactory. It is possible that the Cape flora once covered South Africa. Then the land dried up, and only the plants growing in the mountains survived the transformation. Proteas and heaths vanish when you enter the Karoo; but in the mountains, the Kamiesberg and Katberg, you will find them again. The wind did not carry those seeds, for the distances are too great.

So there are clues in the mountains and the climber who is also a botanist finds a deep interest in the flowers of the heights. Sometimes they rediscover plants described by Masson and Thunberg and Burchell; flowers that have not been seen by human eye for more than a century.

One climber who has done great work for science is Mr. T. P. Stokoe, who still spends weeks alone in the Cape mountains although he is more than eighty years of age. There is not a range in the Western Province on which he has not set foot; and many new species and sub-species have been given his name. Probably his

most outstanding find was *Mimetes Stokoei*, a proteaceous plant so rare that only one is now known to exist in the Caledon district mountains. There were seven, but Mr. Stokoe felt justified in taking one to Kirstenbosch in the hope that the species might be preserved there. The one survivor in the only known natural habitat was saved by a farmer who climbed specially to the site and treated it with insecticide.

One of the standard works for South African botanists is still the late Dr. Rudolf Marloth's "The Flora of South Africa." Owners of these four volumes who purchased them as they appeared between 1913 and 1932 at the original price of two guineas apiece are fortunate. The set now fetches up to £140 in good condition. Marloth arrived at the Cape from Bavaria towards the end of last century. He was an analytical chemist, and botany was his hobby. During long and lonely walks and climbs he

made the first study of the chemistry and biology of Cape plants.

Probably his greatest discovery was the "*Aloe succotrina*," when he cleared up a mystery as remarkable as the Guernsey lilies. About 250 years ago there was an aloe which no one could identify in the Amsterdam botanical gardens. Johan Commelin, the curator, described it in his "*Horti Medici Amstelodamensis*" in 1697. It was his carefully-nurtured prize, but he admitted that the origin was unknown. A sailor had brought it to the gardens and departed without saying where he had found this treasure.

Botanists formed the theory that the aloe must have come from Socotra island (where several aloe varieties are found), off the Somaliland coast. Thus the name *Aloe succotrina* was bestowed upon it. Even when aloes from the Cape reached Amsterdam the botanists saw no reason to abandon their theory; for there was nothing like *Aloe succotrina*.

Then one day in 1905, Marloth was climbing a rock slope on Table Mountain, twelve hundred feet above sea level. To his astonishment he came upon a cluster of the mysterious *Aloe succotrina*, with its deep green leaves. It grows profusely only in that one spot on Table Mountain, though a few more clusters have been found since then at Hout Bay and in the mountains on the far side of False Bay. That was a great day, for Marloth had solved a riddle that had puzzled botanists for centuries.

CHAPTER 6

AFRICANA

AS THE LIGHT FADES I leave the stoep and the dam to the bats and go indoors to my books. There they are, shelf upon shelf, no mean library, but nothing compared with the Africana collections I have seen.

The man who made me realize the fascination of South African books was the late Mr. W. E. Fairbridge, a tireless historian and owner of a huge and valuable Africana library. A tall,

cadaverous man, he was said to have invented the name Rhodesia; he certainly started the first newspaper there, in a clay and reed shack.

During most of his life he followed the daily habit of jotting down items of history on cards of a uniform size, so that in the end there were many thousands of cards dealing with many hundreds of South African subjects ranging from acorns to Zulus. Biographies, weather oddities, the events that made news in remote places, botany and crime, food and fauna - there was little that escaped the keen eyes of W. E. Fairbridge. He combed all the volumes of Theal, the files of early Cape newspapers, and the whole of his own vast collection of books, magazines and pamphlets, to build up this truly unique storehouse of information.

When he retired from business he devoted his whole time to the "Fairbridge cards." Many an hour I spent with him. I found clues to stories which would have been lost but for this unusual hobby. Year after year I scented riches in the dust of those steel filing cabinets; and then went

out to far places like a treasure hunter equipped with a chart. I knew what to seek, and sometimes I found it.

With his cards and his books, Fairbridge lived an adventurous life over again. He died in Montreux, Switzerland, in 1943 at the age of seventy-nine. I am still studying his cards, and still I imagine the studious face and aquiline nose of W. E. Fairbridge beside me, advising, summing up, lecturing gently out of his wide experience and love of South African literature.

Another man who helped me to form my own little Africana collection was the late Mr. E. P. Kitch, a huge and sombre second hand bookseller. He, too, was an authority on books - he had 100,000 in his shop in Cape Town and it was seldom possible to baffle him with an Africana problem. He was a liberal-minded teetotaller. Temperance gave him a great interest in life, but he sold me many a book in praise of wine.

At one time I think Mr. Kitch knew more about Africana than anyone else in the world. The

catalogue he compiled in 1903 was the first comprehensive Africana list. His valuations were shrewd and accurate, and he could tell you within half a guinea the current price of a mint copy of any rare work dealing with South Africa, a Latrobe or Burchell, Barrow or Steedman. For this reason he was called in by universities and librarians when famous collections had to be valued. Sales of books brought out Mr. Kitch's unerring judgment to the full. He had a sixth sense for first editions. I still find books in the dark recesses of his old shop, and I have seen the books he advised me to buy double and treble in value.

Greatest of all Africana collectors was Sidney Mendelssohn, the Kimberley diamond buyer whose books are now in the Houses of Parliament. He started gathering South African printed material at a time when many people were flinging valuable old pamphlets into wastepaper-baskets. That was shortly before the South African War. When my father became editor of the "Diamond Fields Advertiser" he discovered a

heap of old, unwanted publications in the office library; but he did not throw them away, he gave them to Mendelssohn.

The collector travelled widely, bought South African books in London, Paris and Berlin, studied them and made notes of contents and authors. When he retired to London in 1905 with nearly 10,000 books and magazines he set himself the enormous task of compiling his famous bibliography. This two-volume work was published in 1910 at two guineas. If it is offered to you today for £40, take it.

Mendelssohn loved books more than diamonds, and his years of skilful collecting and research made his bibliography a classic. Only five hundred copies were printed. It covered all significant references to Africa that Mendelssohn was able to find from the days of the Portuguese explorers to the year of Union. Mendelssohn's books and pictures may be examined in the Houses of Parliament by any responsible person. As far back as 1922, experts valued the collection at £15,000.

The splendid Gubbins collection was burnt in the 1931 fire at the Witwatersrand University. Dr. J. B. Gubbins believed that the ordinary man enjoyed reading about how his ancestors lived and worked, the food they ate and the clothes they wore. Besides his five thousand South African books he had many rare pictures and sketches. After the fire Dr. Gubbins set himself the task of replacing the lost works. He travelled as far afield as Australia, the Dutch East Indies, Ceylon and Egypt; and he ransacked the bookshops of London to recreate the vast picture of South African life which had been lost when his original library was burnt.

Women are to be found among the Africana collectors, notably Miss Killie Campbell of Durban. She started as a young girl, and now has 20,000 volumes; probably the most complete collection of Africana relating to Natal. In Cape Town there is Miss M. K. Jeffreys, formerly of the Archives, an authority on life in the Cape during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It

is possible that she is the greatest living authority on the subject.

Earlier than any of the collectors I have mentioned was a Cape Town attorney, Mr. Charles Aken Fairbridge of "Mimosas," Sea Point. In his stately home he had thirteen thousand books, antique furniture and pictures. He was, of course, the father of Dorothea Fairbridge, the author. Mr. Fairbridge represented Caledon in the first Cape Parliament; he stocked the Cape rivers with the first trout and perch to be introduced; and designed the flag of the Cape Colony. As far back as 1883 he and John Noble compiled a catalogue of books dealing with South Africa. Sir Abe Bailey bought the Fairbridge books, and in 1925 he presented them to the South African Public Library.

Incidentally the works of Dorothea Fairbridge are typical of the rise in prices of Africana books. I have a copy of her large and beautiful "Historic Houses of South Africa," probably the gem of my small collection. This book was published in 1922 at three guineas. Before the war it could be

bought for £12 10s., and after the war I had to pay £20. The other Fairbridge works have not reached the same heights. Some of her novels are still available at a few shillings apiece, though a first edition of "That Which Hath Been" is worth thirty shillings.

Wise and far-sighted were those Africana enthusiasts who joined the Van Riebeeck Society when it was formed in 1918. I see that the complete set of the Society's twenty-eight publications is now worth £110. This society which has printed so many fine historical works originated in a queer way.

The trustees of the South African Public Library had brought out the diary of Van Pallandt, secretary to General Janssens at the Cape early last century. General Hertzog was roused to anger by certain passages in the diary, and attacked the library trustees in the House of Assembly.

This attack gave the diary such wide publicity that the whole edition sold out immediately. Mr.

A. C. G. Lloyd, the librarian, then suggested that a society should be formed to publish further historical documents. The trustees had the money raised by the sale of the diary, and they were backed by Mr. John X. Merriman.

So the Van Riebeeck Society came into being. The first volume published, a description of life at the Cape by Governor de Chavonnes (1714-1724) cost members only ten shillings. It fetched £21 at a recent sale; and other volumes on the wreck of the Grosvenor, Louis Trichardt's trek, early Cape Hottentots and the narratives of explorers are all worth many times the original price.

The society's editors are now engaged on their most formidable task. They are preparing Van Riebeeck's diary for publication in six or more volumes to mark the 1952 tercentenary of the Cape. This will cost more than £15,000, for Van Riebeeck wrote half a million words, and the books are to appear in Nederlands and English. Even the skilled translator has to struggle with Van Riebeeck's language; many of his passages

have baffled scholars in Holland. It was his habit of mixing French with Nederlands that makes the interpretation so hard. Only fragments of the massive diary have been published up to now. The full story covers the first ten years of the Cape settlement. It will reveal Van Riebeeck, the man, more clearly than ever before.

Mere age is certainly not the test of value. Old books containing good colour-plates, however, are in enormous demand. A second edition of Barrow's "Travels in South Africa" is now worth £25, while the first edition, published in 1801 without the plates, fetches much less. Among fairly recent books which have risen dramatically in value is Pearce's "Eighteenth Century Architecture in South Africa;" published about twelve years ago at three guineas, it has reached £20. One work which collectors are always eager to acquire is Mrs. A. E. Roupell's "Specimens of the Flora of South Africa." There are nine exquisite colour plates, and a good copy is worth £65. Old magazines, such as the "State" and

“Cape Monthly Magazine,” are usually valuable only when complete sets can be offered.

I have observed a strict relationship between literary value and cash value. Cornell’s “Glamour of Prospecting,” a true narrative of adventure, is expensive not because it has been out-of-print for many years, but also because it is one of those books which many people like to read and read again.

Book collectors often think wistfully of the old Cape Town bookshops where the great treasures of today were sold at face value - or below. There was not a bookshop in the town, I believe, at the beginning of last century. Readers had to rely on auction sales. An auctioneer and general merchant named Sheppard appears to have opened Cape Town’s first bookshop. He advertised in 1816 that he kept books for sale at 21, Heerengracht. Five years later D. E. Wentzel of Greenmarket Square was offering encyclopaedias at 500 rix-dollars a set. He threatened to send the books on to India if they were not sold quickly.

The great character among early Cape Town booksellers was Joseph Suasso de Lima. He arrived in 1818, a Sephardic Jew from Holland, but later a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. Small, ugly and lame, he first became teacher to the slave children. To this day the Malays call a man with a limp “Ou de Lima.”

De Lima wrote poems, plays, almanacs and the first post office directory. One of his books, “Gedichten,” published in 1821, included a poem on the Cape. He also wrote a treatise on the early Afrikaans he heard in Cape Town, called “De Taal der Kapenaren.” And to his credit stands the first Cape history published in South Africa, entitled “Geschiedenis van de Kaap de Goede Hoop,” and written in the form of a catechism.

His bookshop was in Church Street. He was a sworn translator in a dozen languages. His weekly newspaper, “De Verzaamelaar,” was full of society gossip and satirical humour. Yet in spite of all these activities he was always in debt.

Africana, printed in Cape Town, began with a quaint Almanac, illustrated with wood-cuts, and bearing the imprint of Johan Christiaan Ritter. He was South Africa's first printer, and his tiny 1796 Almanac was limited to four copies at sixpence apiece. The South African Public Library has a fragment of one copy. All the others have been lost. Search your attic or brandsolder, for a complete copy of Ritter's Almanac (with its cherubs which may have been cut by Thibault), would be worth as much as any Cape triangular.

Mr. A. M. Lewin Robinson, the assistant librarian at the South African Public Library, showed me another early example of Cape printing which came to light during the examination of the original Lady Anne Barnard letters. It is a concert ticket dated June 9, 1800, and was probably printed by Ritter. The concert was held at "Sea Lines," a naval hospital.

No doubt you have glanced at the notice-board outside the library with the inscription "Grey, Dessinian and Fairbridge Collection." The

nucleus of the library was formed by about 4,500 books given to the Dutch Reformed Church in 1761 by Joachim van Dessin; books on theology, history and science in Nederlands, German, French and Latin.

Dessin had bought up the libraries of smallpox victims, and it was a grand collection at that period. Today it is not so valuable, though some of the old volumes are still worth studying - for example, a mid-eighteenth century French work on arts and trades, describing everything from tailoring to boat-building. Dessin's books still belong to the Dutch Reformed Church, and only the Scriba can grant permission for a book to be removed. In the early days of the library, when there was only a slave in charge, Cape Town citizens borrowed some of the best of Dessin's books and failed to return them.

Wine started the public library - the tax on wine imposed by Lord Charles Somerset in 1818 to "place the means of knowledge within the reach of the youth of this remote corner of the globe." Pringle the poet was the first librarian. Lord

Charles, the old hunter, suggested that there should be plenty of books on animals. At one time a military sentry guarded the door and scrutinized the subscribers.

It was a poor library, however, until Governor Sir George Grey selected the site of the present buildings in the Gardens and gave his own collection of books and manuscripts. Not long before that the librarian was able to sit at his desk and point unerringly at any book required. Grey's gift, of course, included the greatest treasure in the library, the Shakespeare first folio, now worth at least £20,000.

With such rich variety it would be difficult to select the most valuable Africana book in the library. Mr. Robinson suggested Francois Le Vaillant's "Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa," published just before the end of the eighteenth century. He was a picturesque adventurer indeed, and his narratives have stood the test of much criticism.

There is an earlier work, however, even rarer than Le Vaillant. That is the original Swedish edition of Sparrman's "Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope 1772-6." Andrew Sparrman was not only a botanist but a doctor of medicine, geographer and zoologist whose descriptions of the Cape platteland form a lively historical document.

The first literary work printed in Cape Town (in 1802) appears to have been a book containing one poem, "De Maan," by the Rev. Meent Borchers of Stellenbosch.

Travel books, some with excellent colour plates, take a high place in the list of Africana of early last century. Barrow and Semple, Latrobe, Lichtenstein, Burchell - the library has them all. William Burchell's two-volume work, with its fine illustrations, is both valuable and reliable, the most important book of the period. Artist, scientist and musician, Burchell was also an indomitable explorer and an admirable writer.

For more than half a century the South African Public Library has been a “copyright library.” This means that the library is legally entitled to a free copy of every book and pamphlet published in South Africa; though the librarian has to remain alert so that no unintentional breaches of the law are committed.

As a result, the Afrikaans section is almost complete, though books in Afrikaans date back further than you might think. The very first examples, one political and the other religious, were printed in 1861. No copies have ever been discovered. They are known only by the brief reviews in the newspapers. What a find to make in an attic!

You can read the first Afrikaans newspaper in the library, published nearly half a century before Afrikaans became an official language. It was the “Patriot” of Paarl, and early copies are rarities.

Those faithful pioneers who were struggling to gain recognition for Afrikaans waited for this

newspaper (as the “Patriot” said) “like a dog for its meat.” The “Patriot” gave them poems, fiction, hunting yarns, nature stories and folklore - and politics. It was edited by the Rev. S. J. du Toit, who also produced the first Afrikaans grammar book and the first Afrikaans translations from the Bible. “*Ons skryf soos ons praat*,” was the slogan of the “Patriot.”

Before the end of last century the firm of D. F. du Toit of Paarl had placed 80,000 copies of Afrikaans books on the market. According to an estimate I have seen, there are now more than 1,000 different Afrikaans novels, nearly 300 plays, about 130 books of poetry. And as I have said, there are few gaps in the library’s collection. The good Afrikaans novelist is in a happy position, for he can usually rely on a sale of 10,000 copies.

Apart from the formal, official “Cape Town Gazette” of 1800, the oldest English newspaper was Fairbairn’s “South African Commercial Advertiser.” It was published from 1824 to 1860, and recorded so many interesting events that the

complete files are now being preserved on microfilm.

A more entertaining weekly was “Sam Sly’s Journal,” which flourished in 1843 and gave more intimate (and peculiar) sidelights on life in Cape Town. Twenty years later came “Snooks Journal;” which set out to provide “news and amusement for lovers, merchants, bankers, bakers, ladies, bachelors, maids, husbands, fathers, mothers, sisters and everybody - price sixpence.”

Africana manuscripts in the library include the diary of Adam Tas, Lord Macartney’s account book, David Livingstone’s notebook kept during the journey to the Victoria Falls, and manuscripts written by Olive Schreiner and Pauline Smith.

Just over a century ago a novel, “Ten Thousand a Year” by Samuel Warren, was banned in England. The publisher overcame the difficulty by having an edition printed in Cape Town, and copies are available - not “under the counter,” but not for removal from the library.

Maps are always in demand. The large collection in the library has not been easily accessible in the past, but they are now being rearranged so that all the maps of an area will be found immediately in one drawer. Secret maps, compiled during the recent war, have been added to the collection.

You can study a ninth century manuscript by an Irish monk, or borrow the latest novel (if you wait your turn) in the South African Public Library. There are now 300,000 books, insured for £200,000. Such is the rich store-house which once consisted, according to an old description, of “half a dozen old volumes, a Bible, two skulls and a few native weapons.”

Archivists develop a queer sense of familiarity with past centuries. It comes only after years of study among the yellow documents, and then it is a strong and definite feeling. In the Cape Archives at the top of Queen Victoria-street they

live again in the real world of Van Riebeeck and the men who followed him.

Often an archivist cannot tell you how he acquired some piece of historical knowledge. There was no particular source. It seems that one implication after another builds up a certainty equal to recorded fact. The road to learning means a long journey in the Archives, and time loses its importance.

Cape Town is fortunate in having these records, for so much was burnt in the first half of last century that the survival of a great mass of important material was remarkable. It was not until 1876 that the government placed £500 on the estimates for the collection and editing of the Archives of the Cape Colony. Soon afterwards the Rev. H. C. V. Leibbrandt was entrusted with this task; more than one man could have accomplished in several lifetimes.

Leibbrandt set to work in the cellars of Parliament House, and Ian Colvin (in "The Cape of Adventure") gave a vivid picture of him:

"Leibbrandt the archivist sat in his little cell hunchbacked with much study; a black velvet skull-cap over his white hair ... a ponderous and venerable man, surrounded by his faded archives."

There was a gap when Leibbrandt retired in 1908; and when Mr. Colin Graham Botha took charge four years later much historical wealth remained hidden in the 6,000 volumes in the cellars.

Journals, day books, letters, memorials, petitions, reports, official notices, proclamations - the raw material of the Archives seems dull until you have had time to make a deeper examination. Then you find the riches; the majestic narratives of Portuguese priests and poets and navigators, Camoens, De Barros, Perestrello; the voyages of tall East Indiamen and the vicissitudes of old Cape families. In show cases are fragments of timber from a treasure ship lost near Camps Bay, a "post office stone" found on Lion's Rump, and the blocks from which the earliest paper money was printed at the Cape.

Events recorded during certain years are hard to decipher because a dishonest contractor sold the government ink powder adulterated with sand. So when the archivists turn back to 1798, or 1803, they often have to use ultra-violet rays. Documents written in the early years of Van Riebeeck are clear enough, and the stout paper has lasted far better than the flimsy stuff of fifty years ago.

Burial rolls, slave papers, the log-book of a brig, maps and engravings - the Archives have been indexed at last and the small collection of Leibbrandt's day has grown to more than 70,000 volumes.

Among the discoveries made in recent years was an account of Robinson Crusoe's visit to Cape Town. Alexander Selkirk, returning to England to tell the tale of exile that Defoe wrote, spent three weeks in Cape Town in 1711. He had been rescued from his island by two British pirates, Rogers and Dover, and for some reason letters posted in Cape Town by the pirates were copied and preserved. There are many other references

to pirates in other documents. Mr. Graham Botha made a special study of piratical exploits in South African waters, and found mention of Captain Kidd.

Gowns worn in Cape ballrooms a century ago are being kept in the fireproof strong room at the Archives until they can be displayed in an historical museum. Dresses with bustles, wedding dresses with flounces, embroidered frocks, parasols, ivory fans and other fine heirlooms are stored there. Miss Hilda Buyskes, a former inspector of sewing in the education department, is the authority on last century's clothes. She visits the Archives to air and spray the needlework and dresses in the strong room.

Cinema films are also hoarded in the Archives, and no great historical occasion passes without a newsreel being added to this section. Photography is older than you might imagine. There were cameras in the Cape more than a century ago; and I have found the old photographs in the Archives more gripping than any document.

They call themselves “professors,” those itinerant photographers who took Daguerreotype apparatus into the Cape countryside and made “inimitable likenesses” for lockets and brooches. In the middle of last century “Professor” John Paul had a studio in Cape Town. He announced that he was taking “true and correct likenesses, beautifully coloured, giving all the expression of life and beauty, within the short space of 20 seconds.” Cautious “professors,” however, added the words “weather permitting” to their artistic claims.

Landscapes came later. In 1859 the ceremony of laying the foundation stone of the Somerset Hospital in Cape Town was photographed; the stereoscopic views of the Cape Peninsula were on sale at this period.

Two thousand early negatives in the Archives were the work of Mr. Thomas Daniel Ravenscroft, who died at Hermanus in 1948 aged 96. He was probably the oldest photographer in the world at the time of his death.

In the 'seventies of last century Ravenscroft started travelling by ox-wagon and Cape cart, taking the first pictures of many Cape villages and their people. Later he covered the whole Cape Government Railways system with his wooden camera. He photographed a countryside that has vanished and made a record more vivid in its own way than the most brilliant literature can provide. Everyone knew him. Members of hundreds of families stood rigid in the sun while Ravenscroft worked under the mysterious black hood.

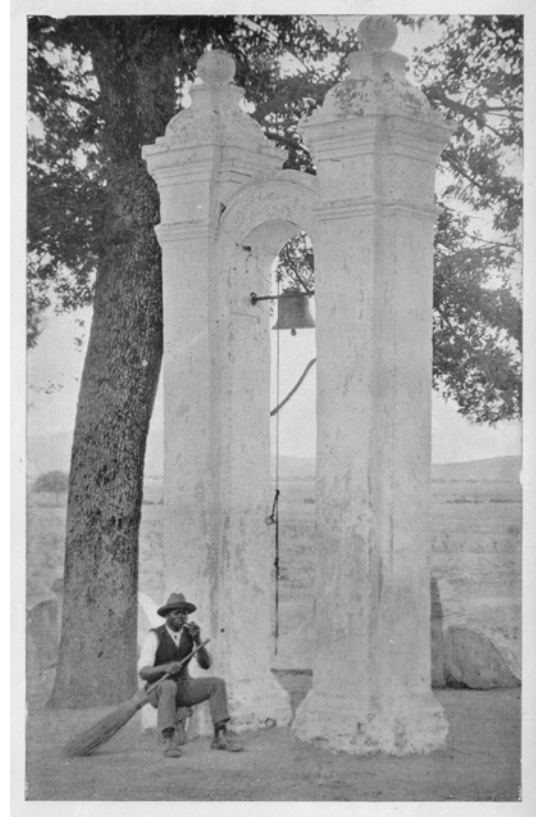
A portrait in oils of another veteran photographer hangs in the Archives - the kindly, skilful Arthur Elliott, an American by birth, but a great lover of the Cape. He was so poor when he took up photography during the South African War that he had to borrow a quarter-plate camera.

Soldiers camped on Green Point Common were his first subjects. Then he was able to buy a larger camera and devote more of his time to his life's work. Elliott realised that much of the historic architecture in Cape Town and the

country districts was doomed. Thatch roofs caught fire; the housebreaker was active. He regarded it as his duty to preserve all the remaining beauty in photographs.

Again and again the value of Elliott's work has been proved. Many a famous homestead, damaged by fire, has been accurately restored with the aid of Elliott's photographs. Some of his pictures were masterpieces. The old camera artist chose the right lighting, the right angle, for his slave bells and orchard walls, his waterwheels and gables.

Elliott also made reproductions of hundreds of old paintings, drawings, engravings and historical illustrations of all kinds. Thus his negatives build up a long story, while his own pictures cover a period of nearly 40 years. A firm in the United States once offered him £7,000 for the collection. Elliott refused. He wanted his pictures to find a home in the Cape Archives. And after his death in 1938 the negatives were bought for the nation by the Historical Monuments Commission for



The Bell Tower. One of Arthur Elliott's studies in the country.



One of the old houses at Clanwilliam photographed by Arthur Elliot.

£2,525. They were worth every penny of the price. Dozens of authors of historical works have acknowledged gratefully the “photographs by Arthur Elliott.”

Departmental records must be 30 years old before they are transferred to the Archives. Up to 1922 no system had been devised to protect valuable documents; in South Africa, as in other countries, sources of historical knowledge were destroyed. Since 1922 everything has been sorted carefully under the supervision of the Archives Commission. There is a constant flow of “fresh” material - 30 years old.

From time to time, of course, the great mounds of paper that accumulate in the Archives have to be combed out. There was a huge bonfire in 1936, when a ton of paper (mainly worthless bluebooks) went into the flames. Before such a clearance, however, the decision is announced in the “Government Gazette.” Everything is kept for two months to allow protests to be registered.

Ten years ago the Archives received a “windfall” in the shape of thousands of old official documents from the Supreme Court vaults. Among them were the records of the Matrimonial Court. Early in the eighteenth century couples who wished to be married had first to secure the approval of this court.

When Mr. Graham Botha started work in the Archives in 1912, the general public had no idea of the value of national records. In recent years, however, the archivists have had to devote much of their time to visitors. Most inquiries are for family histories or details about farms. Dr. P. J. Venter, the assistant chief archivist, who is in charge in Cape Town, had to warn the public not long ago about the bogus family crests which are hawked about the country. Family crests were never registered in South Africa, and this is one branch of history where the archivist can give little aid.

If you go to the private dealers in crests the results may be confusing. One farmer was supplied with a coat-of-arms in which a lion was

prominent. The same man tried his luck with another dealer; and when the crest arrived the lion had become a jackal. Finally he wrote to the Archives and found that both crests were inventions.

Mr. Graham Botha was once asked to settle a violent controversy which flared up in tranquil Wellington over the origin of the town's name. Up to 1840 the place was Wagenmaker's Vlei; but when the people built their own church and the village began to grow, they asked the Governor, Sir George Napier, to allow them to call their village Napier.

The request came too late, for the governor had just given his name to a village near Bredasdorp. Then it was suggested that Wagenmaker's Vlei should be called Blencowe, in honour of Napier's father-in-law, but he declined. Finally the people left the selection of the name to Napier, who wrote a note on the petition: "Call it Wellington. It is a disgrace to this Colony that not a place within it bears that name."

So Mr. Graham Botha was able to show the very words to a deputation from Wellington. Some of them were under the impression that the name had arisen out of the old rivalry between Paarl and Wagenmaker's Vlei, culminating in a local Waterloo.

During more than 30 years at the Archives, Mr. Graham Botha traced the building of the roads leading out of Cape Town, the romance of the mountain passes and the stories of the villages that were born along these routes. He has just completed a book on this subject, and has started another monumental work on social life in the Cape during the nineteenth century. Even in retirement the archivist remains under the spell of history.

Much remains to be studied in the Archives. Miss M. K. Jeffreys, who retired recently after 29 years there, said to me: "I feel that I have only touched the fringe, and I am doubly conscious of my ignorance."

Posterity is unlikely to lament the loss of the Archives through fire. The extinguisher system releases gas, for water would damage the records. But there was a day, years ago, when a famous South African historian almost caused a fire. As he entered the building he put his pipe in his pocket, and nearly set alight to himself - and the Archives.

Afrikaans books and magazines opened up a new world of South African literature for me. If I had my time over again I would aim to complete bilingualism; for the writer soon makes the discovery that there are phases of South African life which can be expressed more vividly in Afrikaans than in English.

The origin of Afrikaans is something of a mystery. It seems to have come out of the countryside rather than Cape Town. A learned professor in Holland years ago worked out a plausible theory called the "Portuguese-Malay origin." He recalled the *lingua franca* spoken in

the ports of the Dutch East Indies, a mixture of Dutch, Portuguese and Malay; and declared that the slaves brought this pidgin talk to the Cape with them. Later research, however, has proved that only about 120 Portuguese and Malay words have remained in Afrikaans, and these are mainly kitchen terms. So the mystery deepened.

It must be remembered that the Dutch language at the time of Van Riebeeck's landing had no standard spelling. Moreover, there were many dialects in the Netherlands, Frisian, Flemish and others; and something had to happen when the early colonists from different provinces mingled in a new country. The process of simplification began; and something with a strong resemblance to modern Afrikaans was being spoken as far back as the middle of the eighteenth century.

The people who spoke the pre-Afrikaans of that period were the farmers of Stellenbosch and the Drakenstein valley. There is evidence that the slaves and other coloured people in Cape Town went on using High Dutch long after the isolated country communities had shaped a simpler

language. In time this became known as “Boerenhollandsch.” The name is significant, for if the new language had sprung up among the Cape coloured people, it would certainly have gained a different description. The fact is that the language of uneducated coloured people differs from Afrikaans as widely as Cockney slang differs from Oxford English. “Every language has the right to be judged by its highest cultural form,” as Professor C. M. van der Heever once remarked.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the language was pushing its way up vigorously. I understand that the first written example of the new language was a poem on the Battle of Muizenberg (1795) by an unknown writer. For half a century after that, however, Afrikaans was rarely written, and as I remarked earlier it was not until 1861 that Afrikaans appeared in print.

They called the language “Boeren-Kaapsch” at that time, and the pioneer was a Sutherland cattle farmer, D. C. Esterhuyze. A Cape Town firm published his verses; but not one copy of the

pamphlet has ever been discovered. The work became known through a review in a newspaper, which said: “They display a most singular and correct power of versification and simplicity of thought, in some cases very pleasing, while in others the naive turn given to them is irresistible.”

Another early Afrikaans writer was “Samuel Zwaartman” of Fraserburg, whose “Boerebriewe” (farmers’ letters) and “Kaapsche Schetsen” were published in 1870. The writer who used this pen name was an Englishman, H. W. Cooper, who died in London. In the same year F. W. Reitz, later President of the Free State, was writing articles in Afrikaans in the “Volksblad” and these were reprinted in the “Cape Monthly Magazine.” It was in 1872 that the movement was started to secure full rights for Afrikaans as a language medium. Arnoldus Pannevis, a Paarl teacher (and, strange to say, a Hollander) was a prime mover.

The first book of Afrikaans poetry was published by the Argus Company in Cape Town in 1888 -

“Vyftig Uitgesogte Afrikaanse Gedigte,” edited by F. W. Reitz, at that time Chief Justice of the Orange Free State. There are probably not more than half a dozen copies of the first edition of the book in existence. Reitz made ingenious translations of certain poems in English- “John Gilpin,” “Tam o’ Shanter” and “Auld Lang Syne.” It is interesting to note that Reitz called his renderings a “verafrikaansing” of the originals. Afrikaans was still “Cape Dutch” or the “Taal” to most people.

Among the Afrikaans publications which have now become valuable are sets of “Die Afrikaanse Almanak,” which first appeared at Paarl in 1877 and ran (with two wartime breaks) until 1918. Dr. P. J. Nienaber, the author, has a collection of early Afrikaanse publications worth thousands; and it took him years to build up his set of the “Almanak.” He enlisted the aid of clergymen, compiled a list of likely addresses, and combed the Western Province in search of literary rarities. Some were found in lofts, in old trunks and mealie sacks; and many a copy of the

“Patriot” was found to have been gnawed by mice.

Dr. Nienaber said that at the time of his search he could have bought the most beautiful antique stinkwood furniture at low prices. One housewife had put her old silver in the loft because it was out-of-date and therefore unworthy of the dining-room. As for old newspapers, pamphlets and books - they could be had for the asking.

Afrikaans began to come into its own after the South African War, though good books in the language were still hard to find. Such men as “Onze Jan” Hofmeyr and G. S. Preller took part in the movement; they felt that the language at least should be preserved from the wreckage of war and the defeat of the republics.

As far back as the days of Pannevis, the translation of the Bible into Afrikaans had been urged. Opposition came from the Dutch Reformed Church. Feeling ran so high in the early days that an Elder threatened to shoot “Oom Lokomotief” du Toit, the Afrikaans writer, for

daring to suggest a translation. As recently as 1919, some of the Elders declared at a Synod meeting that they could not read Afrikaans. One said that if the “Kerkbode,” the church newspaper, appeared in Afrikaans it would be a heavy blow.

Nevertheless, the Bible was printed in Afrikaans in 1933, and by now nearly a million copies must have been published. And “Die Kerkbode,” now a century old, has been appearing in Afrikaans for the past sixteen years.

Another milestone still to be reached in the Afrikaans journey will be the publication of the official dictionary. Work started on this gigantic task in 1926, with Professor J. J. Smith as editor. The finished volumes will contain about 175,000 words.

Professor Smith disliked certain phonetic spellings in Afrikaans, and retained forms which linked Afrikaans words with the original Nederlands. This view started a controversy with the Akademie vir Taal, Lettere en Kuns

(language, literature and art), the ultimate authority recognised by Parliament. Fortunately not many words are affected ; and Professor P. C. Schoonees, the new editor, has settled the matter by giving alternative spellings.

Professor Schoonees appealed to the public some time ago for new and uncommon Afrikaans words and idioms. I am unable to respond, though I have often chuckled over some of the well-known idioms. “*Hy loop nie alleen nie*,” is a superb way of suggesting the drunken lurch. “*Langtand eet*” is even more subtle; it means to eat with great reluctance, as though the length of the teeth is causing difficulty, and is often applied to children. “*Hy staan of die honde sy kos afgeneem het*” is a good one; for a man who looks as though the dogs had robbed him of his food must be very embarrassed. “*Donkie vasmaak*” refers to a young man courting, but it is untranslatable.

Many fine books published this century have helped to establish literary Afrikaans. Most successful of all was A. A. Pienaar’s “*Uit Oerwoud en Vlakte*,” of which more than

100,000 copies have been sold. Pienaar writes under the pen name of “Sangiro” (the “hare”), and one morning he told me how this nickname was given him in East Africa, and how he came to write his masterpiece.

“Sangiro” is a powerful man with a fine head, greying hair and a face that reveals a life of struggle. His parents were ruined by the South African War, and they decided to trek to Tanganyika, where some friends had already settled. It was a nightmare journey; the Pienaar family went down with malaria and the oxen died of East Coast fever. On some days the wagons only covered half a mile. Two of Sangiro’s brothers died. They had blackwater, and there was no doctor.

At last they settled near Kilimanjaro and tried to make a living by farming in this strange world. Sangiro was given the task of shooting the herds of bush pig that rooted up the maize at night. He was small for his age, and so the Masai called him Sangiro, “the hare.”

As a young man Sangiro took to the elephant trail. The ivory paid for his B.A. course at Stellenbosch University. But as a student he was homesick for the veld; his love of adventure had to find an outlet, and so he wrote “*Uit Oerwoud en Vlakte.*”

The book was immediately acclaimed as a work of genius, one which has remained ever since in the front rank of Afrikaans literature. Sangiro believes that each animal has a personality of its own. He writes on life in the wilds with rare insight and sympathy. The late Sir Percy Fitzpatrick wrote an introduction which sums up what Sangiro achieved for Afrikaans literature: “If there should remain a doubt that Afrikaans can express what the eye may see, what the mind may conceive, what the heart may feel - well, this book will go a long way to have that doubt removed.”

As for Afrikaans poets, it is only necessary to quote a stanza which is, perhaps, the best-known of all in Afrikaans:

*Uit die blou van onse hemel, uit die diepte
van ons see,
oor ons ewige gebergtes waar die kranse
antwoord gee,
deur ons ver verlate vlaktes met die kreun
van ossewa –
ruis die stem van ons geliefde, van ons land
Suid-Afrika.
Ons sal antwoord op jou roepstem, ons sal
offer wat jy vra:
Ons sal lewe, ons sal sterwe – ons vir jou,
Suid-Afrika.*

CHAPTER 7

CAPE STAMPS, CAPE MONEY

LOCKED AWAY SOMEWHERE in my cottage is a stamp album which, I fondly imagine, is growing in value with the years. I have not added a stamp to that album since I was a schoolboy, and I shall not be surprised if the collection turns out to be almost worthless.

Nevertheless, I felt a revival of interest in stamps not long ago while I was talking to Mr. Adrian

Albert Jurgens of Tamboers Kloof, Cape Town. Everyone in the South African stamp world knows Mr. Jurgens. His books on the subject are classics; his collection of “postal Africana” is unique.

Yet there are people who find stamps dull and see no inspiration in a faded envelope addressed, with suitable flourishes, to Van Riebeeck. They ought to talk to Mr. Jurgens. The man who now devotes himself to his albums has led a varied and often adventurous life; and the most remarkable story of all is one which Mr. Jurgens never related when he wrote his books.

It came out when I asked Mr. Jurgens how he managed to gather his great collection of letters to all the old Cape commanders and governors. “Tickey beer,” he replied. “That was the secret - tickey beer from a brewery at the top of Long street.”

In his schooldays during the South African War young Jurgens was in the habit of sitting on the ramparts of the Castle, brooding over past

glories. One day he saw a sergeant-major of the Middlesex Regiment in charge of a party carrying sacks to the military incinerator on Woodstock beach.

The sacks were filled with old documents, for the Castle offices were being cleared out and this priceless refuse was destined for the bonfire.

Jurgens was twelve, he had been a stamp-collector for four years and he knew the value of the Cape triangular and other stamps that came out of the sacks. At first the sergeant-major would not part with a scrap of paper. Then young Jurgens resorted to bribery. He saved his pocket-money and arrived at the incinerator each week with half a dozen bottles.

“Any beer today, sonny?” the sergeant-major would inquire. He had a large walrus moustache and the froth collected on it. After the first bottle had been emptied he would turn to Jurgens and announce: “Help yourself, sonny.”

In that way a schoolboy was able to preserve a set of signed envelopes with original seals which

it would be impossible to duplicate today. The stamps and documents Jurgens found are now worth many thousands of pounds. Yet he estimates that nine tenths of the “rubbish” from the Castle was burnt. It would have been different if only he could have bought more beer.

“I have collected everything in my time,” Jurgens told me. “Butterflies, birds’ eggs and stuffed birds, snakes, antelope horns, matchboxes, cigarette-cards - I learnt something from every hobby.”

As a young man Mr. Jurgens owned one of the first motorcycles in Cape Town. He used it on stamp-collecting trips into the country, searched many a farmer’s loft and found many a prize.

But his richest haul was made when he heard that a large collection was for sale. He turned the pages of the album to his favourite section - Cape of Good Hope.

There he saw stamps which, according to a quick estimate, were worth £800. He had £200 in the

savings bank and he decided to spend the lot, if necessary, to secure these Cape stamps.

“How much do you want for them?” inquired Jurgens casually.

“I know more about stamps than you do, and you can’t humbug me,” replied the owner.” I won’t take a penny less than £5.” Jurgens was so excited as he drove away on his motor-bike with the stamps that he ran over a policeman’s toes. That was in 1905. A year later a burglar with a knowledge of stamps entered the Jurgens home and tore the sheets containing these stamps from the album. Today they would probably fetch £15,000.

A few years ago Mr. Jurgens was awarded the Crawford Gold Medal, the highest award of the Royal Philatelic Society, London, in recognition of his published work on Cape postal history.

The Cape stamps that all the world knows are the triangulars - probably the most famous and most popular stamps ever printed.

You may wonder how such an unusual shape, came to be selected. It was due to the report of a Stamp Commission, set up in 1852, which recommended: “In order to obviate errors in sorting letters or stamping, we would suggest the adoption of a device and shape so different from those of the English postage stamps as to catch the eye at a glance, and we would propose that of a triangle with the figure of Hope in the centre.”

So the first triangulars were printed in London and issued at the Cape the following year - the brick-red one penny and the four penny blue. You can identify this first issue by the “blueing” of the paper, the discoloration being caused by the chemical action of the inks. A second issue without this blemish followed within a few years and in 1858 the first sixpenny mauve and shilling green triangulars appeared. All these stamps reveal variations in colour, and some, of course, enhance the value.

So many triangulars were used between 1853 and the final set of 1864 that some can still be bought at low prices. Blocks of two or four are

valuable. Other rarities are to be found among the interesting so-called “woodblock” issue printed by Paul Solomon & Co. in Cape Town in 1861. These were, in fact, engraved on steel and fixed on wooden blocks for the stereotyping process; but they look rough, as though carved on wood, in comparison with the London stamps.

The local printing was due to a consignment from London becoming mislaid. Solomon's stamps were on sale for two years, the authorities being unaware that the stamps ordered from London were lying unopened in the Queen's warehouse at Table Bay Docks. The local printers made one serious error - to the delight of present-day stamp collectors. They printed 201 penny stamps blue instead of red, and 346 four penny stamps red instead of blue. Only one penny unused and one four penny unused have come to light. Used or unused, they are now extremely valuable.

One of the triangulars remains a deep mystery to this day. It is the four penny black. When this

stamp burst upon philatelists in 1878, some renounced it as a forgery and editors of stamp catalogues refused to list it. There was no official record of a four penny black - only the four penny blue.

Then someone declared he had evidence that the Governor of the Cape had ordered three hundred four penny blacks to be printed as “mourning stamps” at the time of the death of the Prince Consort, Albert of England. The evidence was so weak that no one accepted it.

Nevertheless, four more specimens have been found since 1878. One reached the collection of the late King George V. They were genuine all right, but their origin has never been explained. Keep a sharp look-out for the four penny black!

Perforation killed the romantic triangular. Stamps of conventional shapes, and perforated, were issued in 1864, bearing the design of Hope seated. She was to have been caressing a lamb; but at the lost moment a merino ram was substituted, presumably to stimulate the wool producers. Thirty

years later a new design showed Hope standing beside an anchor.

The last of the old Cape triangulars went through the post, and were duly cancelled, in 1900. This was due to the enterprise of a collector who had a number of penny and four penny “woodblock reprints.” He posted letters bearing these stamps to himself, and they were duly delivered. But the Postmaster-General asked him not to do it again, and soon afterwards the triangulars were “demonetised.” This was exactly what the collector wanted. He sold the envelopes at £5 each, and these triangulars bearing the 1900 mark are now worth far more.

Then there are the bisected triangulars - sixpenny stamps cut in half during the time of shortage. One postmaster solved the problem that way in 1860, and for years afterwards, whenever supplies ran short in remote post-offices, other postmasters followed the example. No one protested; the Postmaster-General approved. Four pence was the ordinary letter rate at that period. So letter writers put a penny triangular, and half a sixpenny, on

each letter. Covers with examples of this device are well worth collecting.

The craze of Cape triangulars was started by London stamp dealers who advertised in the Cape Town papers between 1889 and 1899. They offered ten shillings a hundred, and accepted all denominations of all issues - as well they might. Values rose from that time, and they are still rising.

But the Cape triangular has a charm of its own. The selection of that unusual shape was an unconscious masterstroke. It put the Cape of Good Hope in the forefront of countries favoured by collectors. And the old Cape Governments played fair with the philatelists of the world. They never overburdened them with new issues, as some countries have done for the sake of easy revenue. So the Cape triangular retains its fascination. The charm has grown with the years and the old triangles of paper have become treasures indeed.⁴

⁴ The most valuable Cape triangular, the woodblock error 4d. carmine, is now catalogued at £1,000.

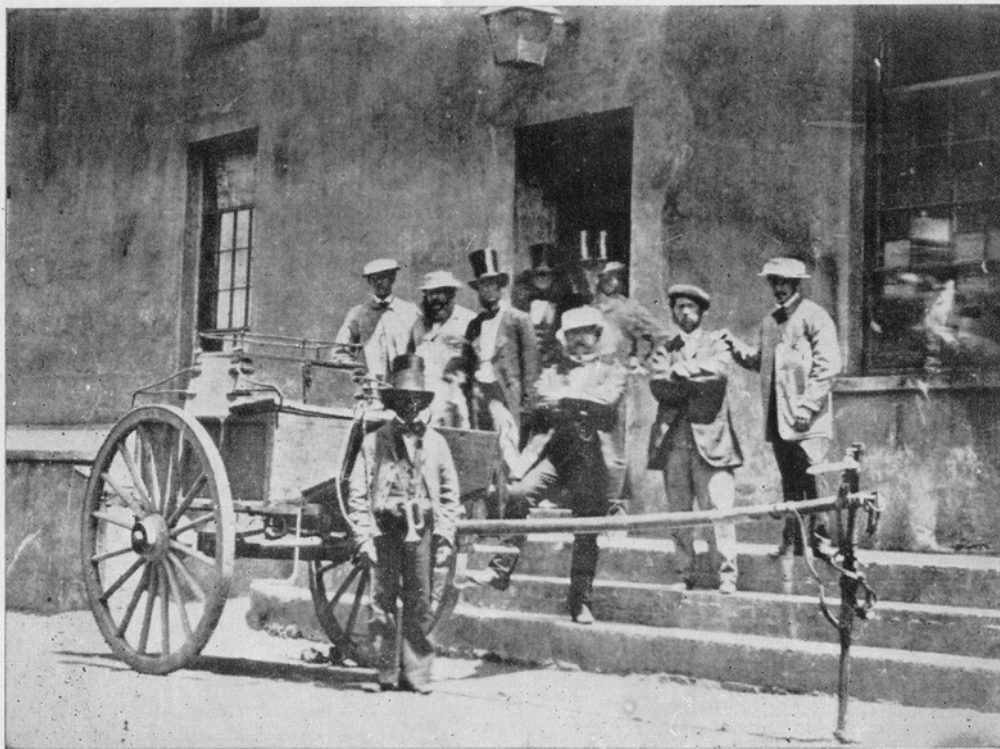
There were post offices, of a sort, in the Cape centuries before the “Cape three-corners” appeared. One of the Portuguese captains who sailed with Cabral put into Mossel Bay in 1501 with news of the loss of Bartholomew Diaz and his ship at sea. This captain, Pedro d’Ataide, found a melkhout tree near high-water mark; so he posted his letter in an old shoe, which he hung on a branch of the tree. He also left a note asking any ship bound for Lisbon to carry his letter.

It was a long chance, but it came off. Juan da Nova called at Mossel Bay a few months later and found the letter. Da Nova left two “post office stones” near the tree, which still stands and has been proclaimed an historical monument. These stones are much older than any of the English, Dutch and Danish “post office stones” found on the shores of Table Bay.

Governor Rhenius established the first regular Cape postal service during the last years of Dutch rule. Envelopes have been found bearing postal

markings and dated March 2, 1792. Farmers, known as “postboers” and armed with muskets, rode with letters from one homestead to another; and thus letters went by relays all the way from Cape Town to Algoa Bay.

This service continued under the first British occupation. Lord Macartney also sent his dragoons galloping inland with urgent official dispatches and private letters. In 1816 there was a postmistress at Paarl; and ten years later all the towns in the Cape had post offices where letters could be franked. A circular hand stamp was used bearing the words “Post office,” the name of the town and a crown. No values were shown, but the charge for letters was one shilling a sheet.



One of the earliest photographs ever taken in Cape Town – the post-cart at the General Post Office.

“Postboers” were poorly paid, and a Landdrost named Cuyler earned their gratitude by urging that they should receive at least three rix-dollars an hour. Post riding, like the American pony express, survived until late in the century in Cape districts where the tracks were too rough for post-carts. As far back as 1825, however, there was a post-wagon service between Cape Town and Paarl. The wagon halted at the half-way house kept by the Widow Cruywagen, who supplied refreshments.

Mr. Crozier, the Cape postmaster-general in 1828, repudiated liability for money lost in the post. “The risk in crossing rivers after heavy rains, particularly in the night, is serious,” he announced. So he suggested a queer safeguard - cutting paper money diagonally across and sending batches by halves in different posts!

Inns were also post offices in those days. Mr. Tubb of the “Fox and Hounds” at Eerste River was pleased to act as postmaster; while Mr. J. W. Butler officiated at the “Three Cups” near Rondebosch.

Many country people were suspicious when postal facilities were first granted. Malmesbury’s first post office opened in 1846, with an overworked magistrate’s clerk in charge because no one else could be found. The farmers wanted to know whether their letters would be opened by the Government; and they grumbled about the minimum charge of four pence for a letter from Malmesbury to Cape Town. They carried their own grain to Cape Town in those days, sold it for cash, and did without correspondence, invoices and delivery notes.

Penny post within the borders of the small Cape Colony was announced in 1865. Every Veld Cornet in remote areas became the postmaster.

Earliest of all Cape postmen was the Hottentot who carried messages in a forked stick. The postal runner survives to this day. I have met him on a forest trail in the Cedarberg mountains; a middle-aged coloured man with a sack on his back. Years ago he had to walk from Algeria forest station to Clanwilliam and back, twenty miles each way, three times a week. Now there is a bus service

along the Olifantsrivier, and his walk has been reduced to eight miles each way. But his home in the mountains is five miles from the forest station and he sleeps at home every night. That makes another fifteen hundred miles a year; and in his quarter of a century of postal service he has covered more than 100,000 miles. Frederik Simmerie is this postman's name. His favourite drink is honey beer, brewed in the mountains. He has never been ill for more than a day, so that evidently his mild indulgence has done him no harm.

Stamps, the rare stamps of the Cape, are found far more often than old coins and tokens. I am told that the Cape numismatist has a heart-breaking task in comparison with the philatelist.

Yet the money that has changed hands in the Cape since Van Riebeeck's day would make a rich pile if you could see it all jingling down into an old kist. The chief officer of the Dromedaris was rewarded in Spanish reals when he sighted Table Mountain. Van Riebeeck paid a reward of fifty caroluses for the recovery of deserters.

Guilders, rix-dollars, Mexican dollars, were all used in seventeenth-century Cape Town. But the most romantic of all the early coins were those heavy silver dollars known as "pieces of eight." They were also the favourite coins of the colonists, and they remained in circulation until 1784, when the rix-dollar (or ryksdaaler) appeared.

I have handled "pieces of eight," sea-worn silver from a sunken Saldanha wreck. This is money which is something more than a convenient means of exchange; money with the genuine ring of adventure. "Pieces of eight" were minted in Spain. Like the British sovereign of a later century, and the modern American dollar, you could spend "pieces of eight" almost anywhere in the civilised world and secure full value. They were the great trade coins of their day. On their reverse they bore the design of the scrolled pillars of Hercules; so they were also known as "pillar dollars"; and the familiar American dollar sign of today was evolved from that pillar and scroll.

Dutch ducats, gold coins about the size of a shilling but much thinner, circulated at the Cape before the end of the seventeenth century. The exchange rate was eight shillings and four pence. These golden ducats bore a knight in armour. There were also silver ducatoons, similar to “pieces of eight,” but minted in Holland.

The rix-dollar was worth four shillings and two pence in English money; while one skilling amounted to a trifle more than sixpence. Venetian sequins were also slapped on to the tavern counters of old Cape Town; and as they were gold they were treated with respect.

English spade guineas, Indian rupees and pagodas, Portuguese escudos, louis d’ors of France, and the oblong pieces of beaten gold called kobans from distant Japan were all accepted readily enough on the shores of Table Bay.

Long after the “pieces of eight” came the magnificent Maria Theresa dollars, first struck in Vienna in 1780, and still minted with the same

design and date in recent years for primitive peoples who liked money to look like money. Maria Theresa dollars fluctuated according to the value of silver; but the traveller who carried them came off better than the man with weird small change. There must have been confusion in many a Cape Town counting house in the days when mohurs mingled with stuivers.

English coins became legal tender at the Cape in 1806, and the heavy “cartwheel” penny pieces bearing the head of George III soon became known as “dubbeltjes,” as they were worth two pence. Dutch coins still circulated, however, and it was not until 1826 that the public accounts of the colony were kept in pounds, shillings and pence.

Oddities of the early nineteenth century were the bronze and silver tokens struck by the London Missionary Society in 1815 for use on their mission stations at the Cape. Many other organizations and firms followed this example last century; and collectors who specialise in tokens have a wide field.

Country stores, police canteens, mining companies, tramways, wine merchants, breweries, hotels, dairies and many others issued their own brass, celluloid, white metal, nickel, aluminium, copper, bronze or pewter tokens. Cape Town had a half-penny newspaper, the "Evening Express," in 1880; and as the newsboys were always short of change, the publisher solved the problem by having ten thousand bronze tokens made in Birmingham. They were of farthing size, and bore the words: "Good for One Copy Evening Express - Fredk. R. Lovegrove and Co., Printers, Cape Town." Thousands vanished after the manner of small coins, and collectors now seek these tokens eagerly.

While Napoleon was living in exile on St. Helena the busy island received its own coinage for the first time. The coins bore the arms of the English East India Company, and circulated at the Cape as freely as on the island.

You still hear one and sixpence referred to as a dollar at the Cape. This may be traced back to a government notice of 1825 in which the people of

the Cape were informed that they could exchange British silver money for new paper rix-dollars at the rate of one shilling and sixpence for each rix-dollar.

It is not generally known that Australian gold coins, minted in Sydney, were declared legal tender at the Cape in the 'Sixties of last century. But it was not until 1874 that the first truly South African coins found their way to the Cape, and then they were "Burgers ponde" of the Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek which President Burgers had ordered from England. They are extremely rare, for only 837 golden pounds were struck and many were converted into watch-pendants and brooches. All the Kruger series followed, and some remained in circulation until the Union abandoned the gold standard. Proof sets, coins with the double shaft error, and the celebrated "Marks tickey" in gold are the great prizes among Kruger coins. The wagon error was committed by a German die-sinker who had never seen a wagon with one shaft and refused to believe that such a vehicle existed.

Paper money first appeared at the Cape in 1782 when Holland was at war with England and the shortage of metal currency had become acute. French soldiers in the service of the Dutch East India Company were clamouring for their pay. They received it in the shape of parchment and cardboard tokens embossed with the V O C monogram and signed by high officials. These notes were called in and redeemed; and few have survived the bonfire.

British notes were issued during the first British occupation of the Cape. Farmers evidently had great faith in these notes, for in 1802 the official "Gazette" complained of a scarcity of paper money as a result of hoarding in the country. The "Gazette" also mentioned the murder of a farmer for the sake of his paper rix-dollars; and it quoted another farmer who had lost his savings when a mouse found its way into his strong-box and gnawed the paper into "inconceivably small and worthless pieces."

In the 'twenties of last century the Cape Town butchers issued their own notes, called "slachter's

brieven," in payment for cattle. One firm of merchants in the Swellendam area had handsome banknotes printed in England, bearing the name of the firm but otherwise resembling Bank of England notes.

Banks opened branches in the country from 1837 onwards. Some of the early notes they issued for local use reveal pleasant engravings of people and agricultural scenes. But decade after decade passed before all the people in the country decided that banks were to be trusted. Business was done on a cash basis, mainly in gold, and many tales are told in the Cape of farmers who kept their money hidden in or around their homesteads.

One favourite hiding place was the ash-heap at the back of the house. It took so long to unearth a skin bag of sovereigns from the ash-heap that the farmer relied upon catching a possible thief in the act. Others felt secure when they locked up their hoards in massive wagon-boxes.

Storekeepers in many villages acted as bankers, and were trusted implicitly. They had safes; and

some charged for the storage of money. This appeared reasonable enough to farmers who were accustomed to paying for the stabling of their horses in the dorp. I have been assured by a retired bank manager that in the early years of this century, he had the greatest difficulty in convincing some of his clients that the bank would pay interest on deposits - and return the capital on demand. "Magtig!" That was almost incredible generosity.

In the North-West Cape, when the railway was being built from De Aar to Prieska in 1903-04, transport riders and owners of horses and donkeys made fortunes. Then the Germans came over the border to buy transport animals for their war against the Hottentots and Hereros; and the insistent demand sent the price of a donkey up to £10. My friend the bank manager saw boxes inches deep in German gold twenty-mark pieces.

It was not always sheer ignorance that led people to keep large amounts of money on their farms. "Kontant," hard cash, was the rule of the veld, as I have said; and men buying farms and stock in

distant places simply had to have the money close at hand. A buyer with a cheque book would have had a cold reception in those days. The horse dealer carried a *bladsak* on his shoulders and counted out the money from that leather bag.

Nevertheless, some of the hiding-places were more ingenious than the ash-heap. A farmer would pretend to be examining the walls of his well; but all the time he would be hollowing out a cavity above water-level where he could store his capital.

As a rule he told his wife. One farmer who kept the secret to his dying moment very nearly took his money with him to the grave. Years before he had constructed a false bottom in a coffin stored in an outhouse, and placed thousands of sovereigns between the planks. He was thrown from his horse and killed. If the servants had not complained of the weight of the coffin, the money would never have been discovered. But the widow was naturally wondering and when she saw that six farm labourers were hardly able to lift

the coffin, she guessed the hiding place immediately.

Many are the legends of hoards buried on farms in the Cape. Obviously some of these tales must be true. Often the newspapers report chance discoveries of sovereigns in the country. A great deal of money was buried during the South African War, when the men went on commando. No doubt thousands of sovereigns remain to this day in the earth.

Now that electronic devices are available to detect buried metal there will be a revival of treasure hunting. The law on “treasure trove” in South Africa is clear enough. If you find anything valuable yourself on your own farm, you will probably be allowed to retain the lot. “Treasure trove” means treasure that was buried so long ago that there can be no claimant.

If someone else finds money accidentally on your farm, the law requires you to split fifty-fifty with him. Before starting an organised treasure hunt on another person’s property, however, a proper

legal document should be drawn up. If you find treasure trove after a deliberate search, the whole amount will belong to the owner of the property in the absence of a previous agreement.

Cape stamps, Cape money! The whole tale of sudden and unexpected wealth is not yet told. I have no clues, but I am never surprised when I hear that someone else has uncovered a small fortune.

CHAPTER 8

WEATHER IN THE COUNTRY

ONLY THREE FEET FROM MY CHAIR is my circular dam, sunk to the level of the stoep. In summer the bats swoop over it during this evening hour. Tonight the swallows are passing low across the water - a certain sign that it will rain tomorrow.

Country people, like sailors, are full of wisdom about the weather, and I am not prepared to argue with them or recall false prophecies. They and their ancestors have watched these skies and mountains for centuries. It would be surprising if

some reliable weather lore had not come out of such long observation.

Many of their sayings, of course, are older than the white man at the Cape. Many a proverb came with Van Riebeeck and the Huguenots and the first English farmers. In the English countryside the peacock's cry announces changing weather; in the Cape the call to heed is that of the bokmakierie.

Probably the sheep are the most sensitive weather forecasters in the whole farmyard. When the sheep graze aimlessly there will be no change for days. If a flock is seen moving purposefully in one direction, the wind will come from that quarter. Sheep move into the lee of the hills before a gale, and turn their back to rain that has yet to fall.

Baboons are not always available to aid the forecaster, but great faith is placed by farmers on their movements.

In the Oudtshoorn district the ostriches dance before the rain. Other farmers have to be content

with the light-hearted gambols of horses and mules, which hold their tails up when the rain clouds gather.

Bees sheltering in their hives; ducks searching for snails; garden spiders spinning short threads; frogs croaking in the daytime; ants hurrying about their business; gnats and mosquitoes flying in short circles; these are the small signs which add up in the farmer's mind to mean rain within twenty-four hours.

According to the scientists, the moon has no effect on the weather - the sun is the great influence. But do not mention this piece of modern meteorology in the country. Here it is firmly believed that a large moon halo means misty weather, while a narrow halo will bring a gale. A golden full moon is the warning that rain is near; while a red full moon is the sign of fine, settled weather. If the crescent moon appears with its horns upwards, then it is "holding the water" and there will be no rain.

Clouds are more reliable, though the interpretation of cloud behaviour varies from district to district. A wisp of cloud on a local mountain tells the farmer more than the barometer. Wind, temperature and cloud formations are considered in the farmer's sub-conscious mind, and then you hear a forecast that is more often right than wrong.

An early morning mirage suggests a gale before sunset. Along the coast of the Western Province, cocks crowing early in the evening are announcing a misty morning, no matter how clear the evening sky may be. And if the gulls fly inland, heavy weather is on the way.

Long range weather forecasting started in the country. Old prophets took careful note of the weather during the first twelve days of January each year, and then issued their forecasts for the year. A hot, dry New Year's Day, for example, meant that the whole of January would be dry. Rain on January 4 or 5 signified a wet April or May, and so on. I must say that I would be

inclined to place more faith in the call of the bokmakierie.

Our weather, of course, comes from the west. Before the war the meteorologists had no regular, accurate readings from that quarter. It was only when the Union Government set up a weather station on Tristan da Cunha that the forecasters began to feel more confident about their prophecies. The main problem became one of estimating how long a storm that hit Tristan would take to reach the Cape.

As a rule, weather rolls across the two thousand miles of empty ocean at about thirty miles an hour. Thus an error of three to six hours is pardonable. Nevertheless, the experts wish there was an intermediate island, or a weather ship such as Britain maintains in the North Atlantic. That would reduce the guesswork considerably.

The long range forecasters make use of statistics from an island in the Cape Horn region and from New Zealand. They say that the island provides data by which the mean winter temperature of

Cape Town can be predicted nearly a year ahead; while the air pressure over New Zealand will give Cape Town's winter rainfall nearly a year ahead. Working backwards to the beginning of this century, they have found that they would have been right eight times out of ten.

Finally there are the eleven-year cycles of sunspots, those gas eddies swirling out from the interior of the sun which influence the weather. Rain in the Cape is heaviest within a year or two of the maximum sunspot activity. But this is still far from an exact science.

There is something about the weather in this land that starts controversies and encourages scientists and others to put their ideas into print. I have a catalogue of books and papers on South African meteorology dated 1885; and even in those far-off days there was an abundance of literature on the subject. Today the books would fill a library.

Long before 1885 they were already convinced that South Africa was drying up. Dr. Fritsch had

put forward his theory that it was due to the improvident natives cutting down trees. Robert Moffat the missionary had noted that the destruction of wild olives in numbers near Griquatown had caused a diminution in springs. Dr. John Shaw had blamed overstocking, which led to a change of vegetation and finally a change of climate. Dr. Andrew Smith had observed the disappearance of "sea-cows" from the Kuruman river, where they had been found "within the memory of persons still living." Andersson the explorer had reported that "the Namaquas are loud in their complaints that less rain falls now in their country than a quarter of a century back."

The popular fallacy that South Africa is drying up still persists. Do not believe it. The great central plateau of the Union is not becoming a desert; and the level of the water in bore-holes is not falling. Drought is no new thing. It is a ghastly thing when you observe the effects closely - but not new.

I have a memory of the drought of 1928 in the Prince Albert district. It was the most severe

drought the oldest farmer could remember. Not three inches of rain had fallen during thirty-six months, and many farmers had left their homes and were working on the roads at half-a-crown a day. Old men who had owned motor-cars before the drought; working under the sun just for their food.

In the village, with its green fruit gardens and cool dams, it was hard to believe it. But the government was issuing mealie meal and beans, fat and soap. The school principal told me that he had started a soup kitchen when he found the children fainting in the classrooms. And scattered over the veld were the bones of the sheep and cattle.

Amid such scenes you may feel that the pessimists are right. Nevertheless, if you go deeper into the subject, you will find that neither history nor statistics support the idea that the country is more arid than it has been for ages.

Go back to the journals of the old Commanders at the Cape, to Van Riebeeck himself, and you will

sense a familiar ring in the notes on the weather, their experiences were exactly the same as ours. Rain came in March or April; but they always complained of the long dry season. In fact, it was simply normal Cape weather.

Van Riebeeck was the first drought reporter, and as so many descriptions have appeared since then it is worth recalling the words he wrote on the day of his landing: "It appears the dry season now, the ground being cracked and the rivulets dry."

Early travellers left distressing records of the droughts they encountered, clear proof that some areas have always lived on the verge of famine. There was difficulty in collecting the taxes in 1711 and 1712 owing to drought. In April 1786 the Berg River ceased to flow. Lichtenstein mentioned that in the Roggeveld in 1803 half the cattle perished. But he fell into the usual trap of imagining that the climate had changed. "The character of the Roggeveld has in the course of years undergone a considerable change," he wrote. "Old people remember very well that half a century ago the super-abundance of water in the

district was such that in the middle of summer the nearest neighbours could not get to each other on account of the rivers and morasses and there seldom passed a week without profuse rain, while of late there have been whole summers without a storm."

But there have been wonderful seasons in the Roggeveld since then - and, of course, devastating droughts. If accurate weather records had been kept, no serious variation would have been found in the average rainfall each decade.

The great droughts last century occurred in the years 1816, from 1827 to 1832, in 1846, from 1858 to 1866 and in 1883. From the descriptions available it is probable that the dry years of 1858-66 were the worst South Africa had known since Van Riebeeck's arrival. This century the years 1904 and 1905 were bad; and the Cape was so hard hit in 1919 that "old inhabitants asserted that it was the most terrible drought South Africa had experienced." That sentence comes from an official report. I wish the "old inhabitants" could have discussed the matter with their great-great-

grandfathers. They would have heard the same story.

Aliwal North, I believe, is the only inland centre which has recorded every drop of rain accurately from 1866 to the present day. And the worst year was 1932, when only 10.24 inches fell. A study of the chart compiled at Aliwal North reveals no decline in rainfall. The average for the district is nearly 23 inches.

Long ago that famous meteorologist, Dr. J. R. Sutton of Kimberley, pointed out that it was South Africa's fortune, and misfortune, to be in the latitude of the southern anti-cyclone belt. This belt extends right round the world on or about 30 degrees of south latitude - a region of normally high barometric pressure and no great cloudiness. Under such conditions you must expect bright sunshine - and droughts. Where this belt crosses the land the rainfall is scanty, except on eastern margins - Durban and Buenos Ayres, for example - and in certain mountainous areas. The rule is that rainfall decreases as you cross the continents within this belt from east to

west. There is a similar belt north of the equator. All the hot deserts of the world lie under these belts.

So when the anti-cyclone reigns supreme, when the barometer stands abnormally high day after day for months, the drought continues. It is thought that the state of the vast Antarctic ice field may have some influence on the anti-cyclone belt; hence the lonely meteorological stations which the Union Government maintains on southern islands.

Enough rain falls in South Africa to turn the country into a garden. It is the burning of mountain slopes, the destruction of the natural sponge of vegetation that causes drought conditions. Earth dams are washed away. The water rushes off to the oceans. Someone once remarked that the finest soil in South Africa lies at the river mouths - fathoms deep beneath the sea.

When the rain does come you hear no talk of South Africa drying up. Officially the wettest spot

is in the mountains above Paarl, which catch 200 inches of rain a year. But the flood effects are more dramatic elsewhere.⁵

Have you ever experienced a cloudburst on the Karoo? Unlucky the motorists who is caught out at such times; for he sees the raging waters and never knows whether he will reach his destination. That is the time when bridges go and areas of parched veld become a sea. Beaufort West knows all about these sudden floods. Again and again the Gamka River has swept into the town. I drove through Beaufort West soon after the most destructive floods in its history had subsided. The people were asleep when the river burst its banks. A man delivering milk was swept away and drowned.

Nearly every house and shop was swamped. Guests at hotels had to take refuge upstairs. In the post office next morning the telegraph operator

⁵ Floods along the Orange River are described in "To the River's End" by Lawrence G. Green (Timmins).

kept in touch with the outside world while the water rose almost to the level of his instruments.

Damage on that occasion amounted to £100,000. Homeless people had to live in garages and stables. The most surprising part of the disaster was that the milkman was the only victim to lose his life. Streets were like farm tracks after the flood; the waters had rushed through the town for two hours.

Yet, as I have said, this was no new story. Beaufort West was menaced by floods in 1869, and all the men of the village went out in lashing rain to attempt to save the dam. They had rockets ready for use as the danger signal; and at eleven o'clock in the morning the rockets went off.

Everyone in Beaufort West watched the scene from high ground. The water carried tree-trunks into the village, walls collapsed into the roaring waters and it was three hours before the people could return to their flooded homes. Beaufort West was a small place in those days, but the damage was estimated at £60,000.

Rain brings out the frogs. Sooner or later you are bound to meet someone who has seen a "rain of frogs." Tales of fish from the sky are also common in the countryside and it is well that you should know the truth.

Often the frog story is due to faulty observation. Mr. Walter Rose, the Cape Town naturalist, followed up such reports for years in an attempt to find someone who could give an accurate, first-hand description of frogs descending from the sky. He failed completely, and finally decided that the frogs were on the ground all the time and had merely leapt out of their hiding-places to welcome the rain.

Nevertheless, small colonies of frogs and small fish have been sucked up by whirlwinds passing over dams and deposited miles away. There is no reason to be sceptical unless such reports state that many thousands of frogs came from aloft.

Rain of various colours has been observed in South Africa. For red rain you need a strong windstorm to charge the air with particles of the

red sand of the Kalahari. After that a shower is essential; and showers are rare on the edge of the desert. But when it does come at the right moment, red rain falls. Black, yellow and green rain are other rare spectacles; and all are due to coloured particles of sand or microscopic plants whirled aloft by the wind. I have never heard of red snow in South Africa, though this weird effect has been noted in countries where tiny red plants give their colour to melting fields of snow. Unlike the rain, of course, the snow does not become red until it has fallen.

Hail can be dangerous, and a severe hailstorm on the veld is a full-blooded melodrama of the weather. It comes with a threatening rumble like an express train, a dark mass advancing swiftly behind a screen of lightning. This is Nature's artillery barrage. As the lightning stabs the veld you can see the ground has become white with fallen hailstones.

In a town of corrugated iron roofs the noise is terrifying. Large hailstones go through the iron sheets and thatch like bullets. Natives have been

battered to death by hail. Maddened horses dash over the krantzes. Birds are killed by the thousand. One farmer in the Karoo lost thirteen hundred sheep in a single hailstorm. Cattle, goats, ostriches are killed by the masses of ice. The antelopes cannot escape. Even the fish in the rivers share the fate of creatures exposed to the full force. No wonder the farm people shelter under their tables when a violent hailstorm is at its height.

Hailstones weighing more than two pounds each have been picked up after such storms. The specific gravity of a hailstone is low, but the velocity is considerable. You see hailstones described in various ways in the newspapers, and there is no need to exaggerate; hailstones go up the scale from walnuts, pigeon's eggs, hen's eggs, oranges, man's fist, man's palm, cricket balls, right up to brickbats and slabs of ice.

There is not much profit in hail, but I heard once of a Cape farmer who found so many dead birds near his homestead after a storm that he plucked them, sent them to market and received £24.

Another farmer made the discovery that whisky blended admirably with hailstones. And a police officer, whose back was bruised by hail, spent a fortnight in bed and found that his accident policy covered the risk.

After the Roodepoort disaster of November, 1948, everyone knows what a tornado can do. The Cape countryside is not immune from this sudden terror, striking without warning; more fearful than flood, perhaps, because it is so unexpected.

“Dust devils” are small and comparatively harmless tornadoes. Most of them are too weak to be anything more than a nuisance to motorists; and some of the stronger ones cross open country and encounter nothing they can damage. Sometimes a farmer’s barn is rolled up like paper and deposited some distance away. Or the old willow trees round the dam may be twisted off at ground level. Or the men at a road camp may

stand helpless and dismayed while their tents are whirled aloft.

Old residents of Malmesbury in the Cape Province remember a far more nerve-racking experience. Before dawn on September 29, 1905, a coloured shepherd sleeping under a bush outside the town awoke to a sound he had never heard before. It was like approaching gunfire.

In spite of the blackness and the beating of the rain, the shepherd declared that he saw a huge cloud like a ball. The cloud struck the ground and turned into wind. Within a few moments that wind, a true tornado, had wrecked the centre of Malmesbury.

One heavy sleeper was awakened by his brother. “The town has been shattered - my house has fallen in, and my wife and children are under the ruins,” shouted the brother. They went out into streets blocked by trees, corrugated iron and masonry. They passed men, women and children in nightclothes; people sobbing and shivering.

They rescued the wife and three children, but the fourth child was dead.

At daybreak the bewildered people saw that about a hundred houses, the Roman Catholic church, the Masonic Lodge and several stores had lost their roofs. A number of houses had been completely wrecked. The swollen river had entered the town, aided the devastating wind, and washed away the railway line. Malmesbury was a town of homeless people. Though many were injured, the total death-roll was five, nearly all children.

Among the shattered buildings was the double-storeyed Commercial Hotel. "I woke up to the sound of the wind moaning in the blue-gum trees that flanked the hotel," said a resident. "Then the noise became deafening and I could hear buildings falling. The hotel rocked to and fro, and next moment down came the matchboard ceiling and bricks from the wall. I was pinned in my bed, and when I got my head out I could only see the sky. The upper storey was destroyed, but the barman slept through everything."

Fowls vanished on the wings of the tornado, but a touch of humour was provided in that sombre scene by a hen with all its feathers blown off. It wandered down the street like a poodle.

A four-hundred gallon water tank was carried from the roof of a house and came to rest in a huge blue-gum tree a quarter of a mile away. There it remained for years as evidence of the violence of the tornado. Lighter wreckage was located along the path of the tornado twenty miles away. That is what wind can do.

Compared with a tornado, the strongest south-east gale is a zephyr. The famous Cape south-easter, of course, is caused by anti-clockwise movements of air thrown off by the atmospheric high pressure system of the South Atlantic.

Some of these anti-clockwise "cells" strike the southern tip of the Cape as high winds. Others circulate over the ocean further north, collect moisture, and come inland in the shape of rain. It is thus incorrect to say that the "south-easter brings rain upcountry." The south-easter is

merely a local wind without much influence on the general weather scheme.

Farmers have no reason to love the Cape south-easter, for the soil experts have decided that it causes much desiccation. On the credit side, however, this wind does tend to check certain crop diseases. The dry atmosphere it creates is unfavourable to fungoid growths. Lazy farmers have been known to leave the thinning of their fruit to the south-easter, and to complain during calm, hot spells.

Farmers regard an early snowfall as a sign of a good season in the Cape districts. In some years snow falls on Brandwag and other Worcester peaks very early in April, and then the farmers know that their crops will not fail.

The coldest place in the Cape is Sutherland, 4,800 feet up in the Roggeveld, with a yearly mean of 54-7 degrees. Taps freeze in July as the thermometer goes down to fourteen degrees below freezing point. The village lies in a plain bordered by icy mountain ranges, and every

wind carries a bitter reminder of snow. Ice more than an inch thick forms on the dams. Sometimes the snow lies six feet deep in the drifts and neither car nor wagon can reach the village. Until recently Sutherland was the coldest spot in the whole Union; but in 1948 the meteorologists removed that honour to Belfast in the Transvaal. Sutherland was found to be three decimal points of a degree warmer than Belfast.

During the winter of 1902, the coldest winter this century, the Sutherland district looked like Canada. Snow flattened the country. Men rode over fences and valleys on hard snow. Transport riders and shepherds were frozen to death. Some wagon travellers saved their lives by chopping up the floorboards for fuel; and fortunate indeed were those who had brandy. Hares crept up to the wagons for shelter and were caught and roasted. Some of those who were caught out in snowstorms went stone deaf. Trains had to be hauled out of snow drifts by three engines.

Farmhouse roofs collapsed under the weight of snow. Farmers dug trenches and tunnels to reach

their stables. The sheep kept together for warmth, each one gnawing its neighbour's wool for sustenance. Often they were found by the breathing-holes they made in the snow. Among the sheep that survived, scores went blind and had to be killed. Pheasants, doves, fowls and other birds lost their feet through frostbite. Birds invaded the farms in search of food; so fearless were they as a result of starvation that they roosted in thousands in lofts and out-buildings. Even the vultures overcame their fear of man that year and sought shelter on the farms. Among the animals the dassies seem to have fared best, for they found roots by digging and remained warm underground. Farmers did not welcome that snow.

Further south, skiers rejoice when they hear of heavy snowfalls on Matroosberg, twenty-one miles from Ceres. This peak is the highest of the Hex River range - 7,378 feet. When the 5,000-foot mountains lose their white caps, Matroosberg still freezes.

Only a quarter of a century ago the idea of winter sports in the Cape was ridiculed. Long before that, Worcester people had used sledges for tobogganing on the Meiring Plateau; but skiing was ruled out. In 1929, however, two Norwegians in Cape Town sent for their skis and did quarter-mile runs on Fortejiesberg. Suitable snow was nearly always to be found at six thousand feet.

The growing band of skiers had to find new runs when the Worcester municipality closed Fontejiesberg on the ground that the town's water supply might be polluted. Matroosberg provided the right conditions, though the pioneers had to sleep in caves and a roofless hut once used by a shepherd.

Nowadays, three hours after leaving Cape Town, the skier reaches the huts at the foot of Matroosberg. A walk of one and a half hours brings him to the snowfields. The ski-run is from one to three miles, according to the weather. And the season usually lasts from the end of May to November. For the snow remains in the gullies until early summer, and the last skiers are racing

down Matroosberg while crowds are bathing at Muizenberg.

August, which many regard as a spring month, often produces the coldest weather in the Cape. One day in August, 1869, Table Mountain was snow-clad from the summit downwards for thirteen hundred feet. It is not often that you hear of snow on Blaauwberg on the far side of Table Bay; but Blaauwberg was covered on July 9, 1853. And the rare spectacle of snow on Lion's Head was observed on July 1, 1878.

Burgersdorp had a white Christmas in 1876, while in 1948, as a sequel to a heat-wave, snow fell on Matroosberg on December 21. That is the day on which summer starts officially; but many people in the country found that they needed log-fires.

Certain parts of the Cape possess a definite attraction for meteorites.⁶ I have never been able to

⁶ There is the description of the Grootfontein meteorite, the largest ever discovered, in "So

trace a fatality as a result of these falls, though "shrapnel from the sky" has caused alarm over wide areas.

The earliest important fall on record occurred in the Cold Bokkeveld on October 13, 1838, and the explosion of that meteorite was heard seventy miles away. Judge Menzies, returning from circuit, gave the clearest description of it. It was a calm, hot morning with reddish clouds about; and he saw a silvery object racing across the sky. Then came a rumbling sound.

That evening Judge Menzies reached the farm of Pieter du Toit in the Cold Bokkeveld, and learnt that parts of the meteorite had fallen there. One fragment had just missed a person. Kieviet, a Hottentot, tried to pick up a seven-pound lump, but it was still too hot to hold. Fragments that fell on hard ground were smashed, but other pieces dropped into moist places and were

Few Are Free" by Lawrence G. Green (Timmins).

recovered unbroken. One farmer discovered that he could cut a fragment with a knife, but it soon hardened. At first it smoked and gave out a sulphurous odour.

Mr. Truter, the Civil Commissioner of Worcester, reported that his windows were shaken when the meteorite fell. People heard the rumbling and thought it was an earthquake.

Sir Thomas Maclear, Astronomer-Royal at the Cape, travelled round the Cold Bokkeveld farms gathering fragments and scientific details. The largest piece weighed only eight pounds, but the shower covered a distance of twelve miles, and the path was more than a mile wide. It seems that the meteorite exploded within a few hundred feet of the earth. Seldom has a fall been observed in such detail, and by so many people, anywhere in the world. Large meteorites have often been seen at night, but as a rule the fragments have passed out of human ken.

Dr. Rogers of the geological survey discovered a 1,225-pound meteorite in 1909 at Rateldraai in

the Kenhardt district. It was of an unusual shape, for it appeared to have torn apart from a ring-shaped mass. This was the largest known South African specimen at that time, and Dr. Rogers presented it to the South African Museum.

Early last century Sir John Barrow reported the presence of a huge meteorite in the Humansdorp district. A portion of the iron mass was hacked off and hammered into a sword, which was presented to the Emperor Alexander of Russia. In 1911, Mr. James Drury, the South African Museum taxidermist, was sent to Humansdorp to bring the meteorite to the museum. Though the meteorite was regarded by local farmers as immovable, the ingenious Drury managed to lever it on to a specially-built sledge drawn by oxen. He then built a track to remove it from the hilltop where it lay. At one difficult point he had to push the meteorite over a three hundred foot cliff, but he found it undamaged and finished the arduous journey to Cape Town. The meteorite weighs 2,585 lb., and is the largest in the

collection. These metallic masses from the heavens are worth thousands of pounds.

Most sinister of all weather dangers in South Africa, more sudden even than tornado or flood; is the lightning. The lightning death rate in the Union is the highest in the world - about 55 per million, excluding many unrecorded native fatalities.

In the Cape Province one flash killed sixty-one natives drinking beer in a hut. As a rule, however, the Transvaal thunderstorms exact the heaviest toll. Cape Town itself, I believe, has not known a fatality for more than a century. But a young farmer was struck while driving his tractor at Sauer in the Piketberg district in March, 1948, and died soon afterwards. Towns are safer than the country because there are more lightning conductors. Some experts believe that steel and wire fences have increased the risk on farms by spreading the area over which lightning can be dangerous. This is a controversial point,

but there is no doubt that the ysterklip (ironstone) country in Northern Cape attracts and distributes lightning. Some of those ysterklip koppies have been struck hundreds of times - and you will not find a dassie among those boulders.

Many natives believe that lightning is a phantom bird that streaks down from the heavens in search of meat. Such natives would rather starve than eat the flesh of sheep or cattle killed by lightning.

Trees with smooth bark conduct lightning with grim efficiency. Do not shelter under eucalyptus, poplars or pines during a thunderstorm. Oak trees are an exception to this rule. Their bark is rough, but they are susceptible because their roots go deep to water. The laurel is as safe a tree as you will find, though no tree is immune. Heights attracts lightning, and a man lying on the veld is less likely to be struck than a man standing.

It is the open air that is dangerous. South African statistics prove that six times as many men as

women are killed by lightning; and woman's place is in the home. The view is widely held that motor-cars are immune from lightning effects. Dr. H. A. Spencer, a South African doctor who contributed to the literature of lightning after many years of study, shared this view. He pointed out that motor-cars passed through thunderstorms with lightning playing all round them; and with a long trail of hot gas forming an ideal conductor, yet he had never heard of a "direct hit." It was not the rubber tyres that protected them. The immunity of the motor-car is still a mystery. And railway trains appear to be as safe as cars.

I read not long ago of a nun who was killed instantly by lightning. In earlier tragedies in South Africa a minister has been struck down in his church, a teacher at his desk, a doctor in his surgery, an attorney in his office. Infants in arms have been killed while their mothers went unscathed - and vice versa. But always the people of the veld have provided the greatest number of victims of this unpredictable peril.

Earthquake risks are slight in the Cape, though the most alarming earthquake ever experienced in South Africa occurred in Cape Town. That was on December 4, 1809, and the scenes included the famous "naked parade" of startled soldiers. Little appeared in print at the time; but by 1830 an eye-witness, W. L. von Buchenroder, had recovered sufficiently to write a description of the event for the "South African Quarterly Journal."

Buchenroder said the weather just before the earthquake was fine, clear and warm. The only ominous and unusual sign was a thick haze over the eastern shore of Table Bay.

"In the evening, a little after ten o'clock, three shocks, each accompanied by a tremendous noise, was felt within the space of a minute or two," wrote Buchenroder. "When the first took place I was sitting in a large company, all the members of which started simultaneously and hastened to the door, the majority exclaiming

that the powder magazine must have blown up, while one gentleman called out that it must be an earthquake, adding that he was acquainted with such on his voyages to the West Indies. While we were standing in the street the second shock took place, which we felt much stronger. It was accompanied by a louder and very tremendous noise and resembled the sound that would be produced by a great many pieces of Ordnance fired off at a little distance. The second shock roused all the inhabitants, who came running into the streets in great consternation; many of them even undressed from having been in bed. Within the space of about a minute a third shock, but not nearly so violent as the second, took place.”

A heavy swell set into Table Bay, and rumbling noises continued until after midnight. Buchenroder and other uneasy people walked the streets. Another shock was felt soon after seven in the morning. Nearly all the buildings in Cape Town showed irregular cracks; but not one house had to be rebuilt. Stucco urns and figures on parapets

fell to the street and a few old chimneys collapsed.

There were no fissures in the streets, but at Jan Biesjes Kraal (now Milnerton) and in the veld near Blaauwberg Strand the earth opened to a depth of a few feet. Blaauwberg people swore they had seen jets of coloured water spurt from holes in the ground.

Two years later Cape Town rocked mildly again, this time on a June day. Troops were marching through the streets with bands playing, and the noise was heard above the music.

The late Sir John Kotze described a Cape Town earthquake in 1858, when one of his father's tenants knocked them up at midnight and advised camping out. They all gathered under the oaks at Leeuwenhof and made coffee. For a week afterwards people slept near open doors, but there were no further quakes.

Mild shocks are felt and heard in certain country towns at intervals of years. Beaufort West is shaken occasionally, plaster falls from the walls,

and nervous people rush into the streets. Tulbagh awoke at three a.m. on the morning of August 13, 1948, to a sound like a peal of thunder which came obviously from the earth. It lasted for about six seconds. The typical earthquake rumble, of course, is caused by the fracture and sudden movement of underground rock masses. The note is so low that many people have been through earthquakes without hearing them at all.

There is a classic geological fault in the Worcester district. Buildings and furniture rock occasionally, but no serious damage has ever been reported. Only when you reach Namaqualand and Bushmanland do you enter a fissure region; though in those open spaces the gentle 'quakes do no harm. Malmesbury and the wheat districts are also liable to mild shocks which sound as though a heavy wagon was passing.

The most severe disturbance recorded by seismograph in the Union occurred on December 31, 1932. In some places the shocks lasted for more than an hour and great alarm was caused. One train was derailed and natives thought the

end of the world had come. This was felt in the Cape Province, but damage was negligible. Scientists say that earthquakes may occur anywhere. Up to the present, however, South Africa has been one of the safest countries in the world.

You hear more about heat than any other form of weather. It lasts longer, and it cannot be defeated as easily as a bitter night in winter. The heat in parts of the Cape can be a burden. Indeed, there are days here at Durbanville when I can find relief only by plunging into the brimming dam.

Every year in January and February comes the news of heat in the country. That is when rivers cease to flow; when veld fires devastate the farms; when sheep and cattle die and fowls are scorched to death. Yet people go on with their golf and tennis when the thermometer has passed the hundred mark.

Year after year the famous "ovens" of the Cape appear in the headlines - places with no other

claim to prominence but their intolerable climates. Early this century, on January 23, 1903, the unknown outpost of Main in Tembuland set up the record - 125 degrees. It is known that a scorching wind blew at Main that day, shrivelling all in its path. That record has never been beaten; but on January 9, 1949, the remote irrigation settlement of Onseepkans in the Orange River valley experienced the same degree of heat. I know Onseepkans, with its fine orange groves, shut in by the mountains that radiate heat. For seven days the Onseepkans thermometer remained at 118 degrees; and then at last it rose to 125. Even at midnight the temperature was 110. If I had lived through that week at Onseepkans I would have dropped everything and headed south across Bushmanland for Muizenberg. As a rule, Goodhouse is the hottest spot on the Orange River - the hottest in South Africa. But on the day of the record at Onseepkans, the temperature at Goodhouse was 124 degrees. This is weather for salamanders, not human beings.

At Upington in January, 1949, the doctors had difficulty in taking temperatures. No sooner was the thermometer out of a patient's mouth than the mercury moved up to 110 degrees.

Some of the old weather records make puzzling reading. I have an account of a macabre sunset at Fort Beaufort in the summer of 1868, when "green trees and colours appeared as livid white, white became purple and every other colour as ordinarily seen in nature was different."

But the most ghastly heat-wave of all is fortunately rare. This is the wave of hot air, lasting only a few minutes, which strikes down all in its path; men and dogs, and horses between the shafts of carts. Even the hottest day at Onseepkans must be less formidable than the long ribbon of burning white light that no one can resist.

CHAPTER 9 ON THE ROAD

WILL THE WAGON VANISH in my time from the roads that I can watch from my stoep? For nearly three centuries the wagon has played dramatic roles in the story of the Cape. It would be hard to say farewell to those brave wheels of romance.

Van Riebeeck had a Netherlands wagon at work as early as 1653 - *draaibord* and all drawn by Hottentot oxen, and used for hauling timber from the forests above the Fort. That was the very first of the wagon's tasks in South Africa. The first ox-wagon journey was to Saldanha Bay. According to records in the Cape archives, the first wagon builder at the Cape was Jasper de Berge. He arrived in 1659 as an arquebusier, but was soon put to his trade. Old prints reveal that the Dutch medieval design survived in the Cape for centuries.

With fifteen of these medieval wagons Governor Simon van der Stel made his great exploring

journey into the deserts of Namaqualand seeking the golden city of Vigiti Magna. The first tracks towards every distant frontier were made by the wheels of roving wagons.

Wellington has never lost its old name of Wagenmaker's Vallei. The first wagon-maker set up his forge and workshop there in the time of Governor Tulbagh, midway through the eighteenth century. And in Wellington I found one of the last of the wheelwrights still following the grand old trade. It was from Wellington that the heavy transport wagons climbed the first great mountain pass into the unknown hinterland, and for generations the wagon trade enriched the town. At Kingwilliamstown, too, I watched men shaping ironwood wagons for the mealie farmers; wagons for the Cape border districts where the roads allow no motor-truck to go through during the heavy rains.

While the mule wagon provides a dashing spectacle, the ox does the work. Fifteen miles a day with a full load is the normal pace of the ox; but record-breaking journeys, measured in weeks,

have been achieved. One driver covered twenty miles a day over a distance of four hundred and twenty miles. In 1875 the Port Elizabeth-Bloemfontein journey, which often took two months, was made in twenty-five days.

Sixteen oxen make a good transport wagon team. As soon as it is born, a trek-ox is given a name and taught to recognise it. These names originated when the Dutch East India Company's men first harnessed oxen to wagons at the Cape, and they survive in our own day. Bontman, Geelbek, Blaauwberg, Donker, Witkop, Veldman, Hartbees, Rooiman - you find them in every team answering the silvery call of the driver and nobly straining to the expert flick of a giraffe hide. (A skilful native driver has been known to kill a fly on a leader with one well-aimed crack of the whip.) The colour of the animal usually determines the choice of the name.

Dangers of the road took heavy toll of the wagon folk, but the losses of oxen were heavier still. The metal trek-chain attracted lightning during

the violent thunderstorms of the high veld, so that a whole span would be killed by one shock. Wild animals preyed on the teams; poisonous grasses, cattle fevers, the once-mysterious tsetse fly, and above all thirst explained the whitening skeletons beside the lonely tracks. These grim fragments litter Southern Africa from the Kunene to Delagoa Bay. Wrecked wagons and their travellers lie in the sand of river-beds, buried under desert dunes, decaying in tropical bush.

"Furious and negligent driving" of wagons was dealt with by legislation early in the eighteenth century. A rule of the road was enforced during the first British occupation of the Cape in 1798, and all owners of carts and wagons had to paint their registered numbers, names and districts on their vehicles. For the first time drivers were obliged to keep to the left. When a wagon arrived within two miles of Cape Town, the leading of the oxen by a voorloper became compulsory. And finally, drivers were forbidden to crack their whips in town.

As far back as 1816 the Governor of the Cape paid a French Hoek farmer, W. J. Naude, a gratuity of five hundred rix-dollars for the invention of a super-wagon capable of carrying four leaguers of wine with fewer oxen through heavy sand. At that time the roads were nothing more than tracks. A journey in bad weather from Cape Town to Caledon (now two hours by motorcar) lasted thirteen days.

The volume of traffic became impressive after the diamond and gold discoveries. During the first Witwatersrand gold rush more than sixteen thousand wagons left the railhead at Ladysmith in a year - sixteen thousand wagons loaded with picks and explosives, flour and blankets and the impatient gold-diggers themselves.

Transport riding is an occupation in which the Afrikaner has always excelled. Railways today follow the routes where whips cracked and wagon wheels rumbled. Every city, town and village in the Union has its outspan, and most settlements have grown up round the market squares where travellers once lived in their

wagons. At the time of the Kimberley rush, freight rates were so high that each journey paid the cost of the wagon. During those stirring times the world's strongest wagons were built in South Africa. If they slipped off a rough tack and capsized on a rocky mountainside they were hauled back, new oxen were found, the journey was completed. Even a jeep driver would wince at the sight of the rough, steep mountain passes that were conquered by wagons long ago.

In those days a heavy transport wagon cost £120, but the price dropped to £75 when machinery cheapened production. The last great boom in the wagon-building industry occurred during the First World War, when military orders kept the yards working feverishly. After the war these wagons were almost given away to the farmers. The motor-truck appeared. Never again will the yards hear such eager demands for transport wagons.

Mammoth wagons were built to explore the interior. Pietermaritzburg claimed the largest, Dr. Stanger's "Great Briton," in 1846; but some

years later Mr. Serrurier of Cape Town produced a real “Ship of the Veld” for Dr. Morkel - twenty-three feet long, six feet wide and six feet from floor to roof. A particularly fine wagon was built in 1860 on the occasion of the first royal visit to South Africa. It carried Prince Alfred, later Duke of Edinburgh, for thousands of miles from Cape Town to Natal and back again, the woodwork emblazoned with the Lion and the Unicorn. At Kingwilliamstown a builder showed me a picture of a wagon he had designed for a Bechuanaland chief and used for State journeys across the Kalahari. It had large water-tanks fitted beneath the floor, and the decorations were gorgeous.

Then there are the “sea wagons,” houses on wheels fitted up according to the ideas of their owners - farmers who follow the old urge once a year by taking their families to lonely coasts where there are no hotels. Traders in the native territories were once important customers of the wagon yards; now they use motor-cars. The Union Forest Department still orders wagons of

the *kort-krink* type, built to turn round in the small lanes of the forest. Orders have been cabled to Kingwilliamstown from New York, when an American wanted shooting safari wagons in a hurry; and wagons have been sent as far afield as the Belgian Congo, Kenya and South-West Africa. Some of the most luxurious wagons have cost as much as a motor-car.

Ordinary farm wagons of the well-known “Grahamstown” type, drawn by sixteen oxen and carrying loads up to five tons, are most frequently in demand. There are at least 100,000 wagons in South Africa, most of them built to the “Grahamstown” model. Voortrekker wagons were equipped with wooden axles and the *remskoën* instead of brakes; the wheels being locked with chains and the *remskoën* of grooved hardwood or iron being placed beneath the iron tyres to prevent wear. The ring to which the chain was shackled is fitted to every wagon built today. It was not until 1860 that brakes acting on the wheels came into use.

Spokes are now made by machinery, for it is difficult to find a man capable of making them by hand. The wheelwright is a craftsman with hereditary skill. A clever carpenter would soon discover his limitations when he came to assemble a wheel. The strain must be evenly distributed. The experienced eye achieves more than the rule, so that when the tyre is put on, the contraction gives just the right effect. A wheelwright, in fact, sees the wheel as a whole while he builds it; and that is not an art to be learnt in a day.

Captain J. E. Alexander wrote a tribute to Cape wagon-wheels in 1835, for he found them superior to the wheels then used by the British artillery. "The parts of the British wheels are open and rickety in hot weather, whereas the Dutch wheels are very strong," he declared. "Dutch wheels are made of three or four kinds of wood ... the nave, yellow-wood; for the spokes, assegai; for felloe, red els or white pear. There are many more spokes than in our wheels, in all fourteen for a large and ten for a small. The tyre

is put on in one piece and hot, so as to draw and bind the whole of the wheel firmly together. The wagon, too, is long and elastic and it is quite astonishing to a stranger what severe work Cape wagons undergo without injury."

The wagon looks simple, but it has more parts than you might imagine. A strong belly plank rests on the two great axles with their four strong wheels, the front wheels being smaller than the hind ones. Securely fastened to the *disselboom* is the drawing-gear, or *trekgoed*. Great care is taken in assembling the front carriage; the tongue must be set correctly into the bed of the axle so that the draught is evenly distributed on each wheel.

The projecting belly-plank serves as a foot-rest for the driver. It is no exaggeration to say that thousands of lives have been lost in South Africa through men jumping for this projection and missing it. Even at the crawling pace of the wagon there is then usually no escape. The victim falls among the oxen and the heavy wheels pass over him. A step has now been

added to minimise the danger. But the leisurely wagon appears as a new model only about once in a century.

Boughs bent and lashed together made a framework for the painted canvas tent in the early wagons. There were always cupboards front and back, the *voorkis* and *agterkis* for goods, while small boxes on each side held reins, straps and gear for the yokes and oxen. On trek, the women and children placed their mattresses on the *katel*, a wooden frame with leather thongs, and slept inside the wagon. The men slept beneath the floor, while the servants camped under the stars, close at hand.

In canvas bags, or “jager zakken,” fastened inside the wagon, were stowed the powder-horns, bullet pouches and the formidable long Boer guns called *roers*. In laager formation, with thorn-bushes packed between the wagons, small bodies of Voortrekkers defeated the mass attacks of Zulu impis. As the men fired between the wheels the women loaded the long guns. Those

were episodes of high courage which South Africa has not forgotten.

Watervaatjies swung from hooks beneath the wagon, with the cooking-pots, gridirons and tarpot for greasing the axles. Coffee and sausages, biscuits and ash cakes, meat for *karbonaatjes* (grilled chops) - such was the wagon's larder. With this equipment thousands journeyed into the unknown.

Many farmers rightly insist on the traditional hand-painted *blommetjie* decorations on wheels and sides, the same bunches of flowers that have adorned wagons for more than a hundred years. The general colour scheme still in favour is green for the upper parts of the wagon, with scarlet wheels.

During the 'eighties of last century country newspapers advertised American farm wagons at £30 apiece. They never conquered the market as the American stage coaches had done a few years earlier.

The most famous wagon, perhaps, is that which President Kruger used just before and during the South African War. It was taken to England as a trophy and returned by the City of London Corporation in 1929 as a token of friendship. The relic now occupies a place of honour in the Pretoria Museum - a sturdy, narrow wagon with many drawers and boxes, fit to travel anywhere in Africa. This *staatsbokwa* was made at Robertson by Mr. C. J. H. (Oom Callie) Matthee and others, and it was a magnificent example of wagon-building skill. Stinkwood, yellow-wood, assegai and iron-wood were all used in the construction. It took five first prizes at shows before it was railed to the Transvaal.

Wagons from Cape villages have gone far beyond the present frontiers of South Africa. One of the strangest treks of all, however, was that of the South African wagon which visited England. A circus proprietor was responsible for the transition, and he carried out the enterprise in fine style by engaging a whole Boer family and their native servants. Father, mother, three sons and

two natives, a typical tent wagon and a span of sixteen oxen embarked at Cape Town. On arrival at Southampton the oxen were placed in quarantine, and a span was ordered from Germany to allow the show to proceed. The bearded farmer and his family dressed in Voortrekker clothes; the whip play, the wagon and its homely load all combined to fascinate London circus audiences. If the South African War had not broken out, the wagon would have toured Europe in triumph.

Wagons do not wear out. Not so long ago I heard of a Great Trek wagon which was still in use in Natal after well over a century of work. It was a full-length tent wagon owned by Mr. B. Scheepers of Besters, and it formed part of Piet Retief's company from the Eastern Province. The front fork, upper and under parts of the chassis, the wooden fork connecting the long wagon with the axle and the wheels (except a few spokes) were original Knysna stinkwood parts. Every year Mr. Scheepers gave this treasured wagon a coat of paint. It had never been to a blacksmith's shop.



The men of past centuries loved their wagons and

the wagon life.⁷ The roads were more fascinating, the evening camp fire gave more satisfaction. The brave story of the covered wagon is the story of South Africa. Truly the wagon deserves its place on the Union's coat-of-arms.

If the man who designed the first Cape cart profited by his invention (like the ingenious farmer Naude) there is no record of it. For two centuries the Cape cart has formed part of the Cape landscape. It is one of those typical things which was born in the country.

A woman visitor seventy years ago denounced the Cape cart in these words: "The Cape cart is an invention admirably adapted for keeping the feet cold and the head hot. It certainly bears a distant family likeness to a French charabanc and also to the ubiquitous American buggy, but

⁷ For a full description of the people who still live in wagons, the trekboers of Bushmanland, see "Where Men Still Dream" by Lawrence G. Green (Timmins).

is evidently looked upon as a poor relation possessing neither the comfort of the one nor the elegance of the other. However, the uncomfortable Cape cart reigns supreme at the Cape.”

This was hardly a fair description of a useful vehicle, and Statham in his book “Blacks, Boers and British” (1890) pays a more graceful tribute: “Do you know what a Cape cart is?” he asks. “It is a peculiar but pleasant institution, something like what was once in England called a ‘white-chapel,’ with a cosy leather or canvas hood, and drawn by a pair of horses. It can hold four people easily and can be made to hold six.”

Statham might have added that the Cape cart will cover the ground at an average of eight miles an hour. This speed is maintained for two or three hours, and long treks are carried out with an outspan every two or three hours. The springing usually allows the passenger to doze, even on rough tracks.

There is a pole instead of shafts, of course, and with a good pair of horses a Cape cart journey

is an experience that lingers in the memory. You see more from the high seats.

Nowadays the *oopkar* is probably built more often than the true Cape Cart. This has no hood, and is designed for carrying farm produce rather than passengers.

Before and long after the arrival of the motor-car, the farmer spent money gladly on his Cape cart. And he saw to it that the harness of white *gebreide* leather fitted his horses. Often enough he made the leather himself, first burying a raw bullock’s skin in the kraal to remove the hair; then hanging it from the bough of a tree and twisting it until it turned white. The skin was greased with sheep’s fat to soften it, stretched and scraped and finally cut into strips. White harness looks well on black horses.

Cape carts or horse-wagons carried the mails before the stagecoaches arrived at the Cape. Some unknown poet last century wrote this verse in praise of the post-cart driver:

*The daily heat, the nightly frost,
The storm, the whelming rain;
The sudden torrent from the kloof,
That rages in the plain,
These all for him their perils spread,
He knows their stern array,
And wots full well where the treacherous
floods
Have swept some friend away.*

There were other dangers which the poet did not mention. In the Richmond and other districts, post-cart horses perished in the snow and sometimes the drivers were frozen to death. One post-cart was blown down the Devil's Bellows in the Katberg and another was struck by lightning. After the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley the highwaymen turned out in full force.

Most famous name in the old coaching service, of course, was that of Zeederberg. As far back as 1865, Zeederberg's tented buck wagons and Cape cart were running from Cape Town to the north. Coaches followed, the first arriving in the early 'seventies. They were purely American. If

the Cape wagon-builders ever copied them I have still to hear of it. Many of the coaches that ran to Kimberley had previously been crossing the American continent to the Californian goldfields.

A typical stage coach had twelve seats inside, with room on top for four passengers and the driver. The "saloon" was decorated with silken tapestry. The companies boasted of their careful drivers. Nevertheless, coaches often overturned and a fast journey was an ordeal.

Zeederberg tried zebras in one of his coaches, but the spectacular experiment was a failure and he returned to mules. Every twelve miles along the route a fresh mule team awaited the coach. Between the halts waited the highwaymen.

One gang consisted of Bushmen led by a runaway sailor. The Bushmen stopped the mules with their arrows and the sailor organised the looting of the coach. This elusive band was responsible for many robberies. Fortunately for travellers, the Bushmen fell out with their leader

one day. The sailor was found dead, with an arrow in his body, among the mail-bags from a coach he had robbed.

Those were wild coaching days, and speed came before safety. There cannot be many who remember Cobb's coaches, the Gibson's, and the Red Star Line coaches racing across the Karoo. The tickets they issued had the conditions printed on the back, and they were not reassuring. One clause read: "The contractors will not be responsible for loss or damage caused by the capsizing of the coach unless that be due to the drunkenness of the driver."

Today the Blue Train runs within sight of disused but still visible stretches of the old coach road. Perhaps there are some who have travelled by Zeederberg's coaches and the Blue Train, marvelling greatly at the contrast - and longing for a last echo of the coachman's horn.

Among the most exciting scenes in the country is a mule team at the gallop. With the driver

shouting, the long whip lashing and cracking, the mule-wagon goes thundering down the road at its top speed of twenty miles an hour.

That is all the speed you want if you happen to be a passenger on the wagon. It has often been suggested that picked mule-teams should be sent overseas for exhibition. South Africans take a pride in these splendid animals and the magnificent skill of the drivers.

It was early in the eighteenth century that the Swartland grain farmers started breeding mules. They used the Company's stallions and donkeys that had been imported from the Cape Verde islands.

Mules, they say, have no ancestry and no hope of posterity. Nevertheless, the mule, an "invention of man," can be a magnificent animal with wonderful staying power. In South Africa the tricks of mule driving are better understood, perhaps, than anywhere else in the world. Mules, as I have said, drew the Cape coaches in the days of gold and diamond rushes. Often a mare was to

be seen running beside a team; for the mule will follow a mare and do the work with less whip. It seems to require a lead before making use of its great strength. One white mare with a bell round its neck will keep a hundred mules from straying. The mule, indeed, reveals a definite bias towards its equine ancestor, and regards the donkey with disfavour.

One sometimes hears stories of mules bearing foals. I remember such a pair being exhibited at the Rosebank Show some years ago; but I must leave the explanation to the veterinary experts. There was a sensation at Wellington in November, 1938, when "Falk," a twenty-six year old mule employed by the municipality, was milked outside the Town Hall in the presence of an astonished crowd. The mayor drank a glass of mare's milk in public - sweet, white milk, thinner than cow's milk. "Falk" yielded four pints a day. As a rule the mammary glands of the mule do not function - a fact which science is unable to explain.

During the South African War two Imperial officers purchased a number of mules for the army. When the deal had been concluded, they were offered two ponies to assist in driving the mules to headquarters. "Our orders were to buy mules - not ponies," replied one of the officers stiffly. They obeyed orders and lost half their mules during the journey.

The secret of driving a long span of mules in a wagon lies in the selection of good leaders and "wheelers." Young mules may then be placed between and gradually broken to the task. Driving is heavy on the hands - that is why one man holds the reins and another the whip. It is a tremendous physical strain. After a display the driver is exhausted; he must find someone else to unharness the mules.

One expert driver I know encourages his mules by yelling the principal parts of Greek verbs, thus: "Treko dramoumai edramon dedrameeka." The word of command "Proot!", which appears to have come from France with the Huguenots, is more commonly heard. (The French still use

mules in the Pyrenees, while mules are occasionally seen in carriages in Spain.) Driving a team of mules is not so easily learnt as the control of a motor-car. Inspanning and outspanning are often difficult. Some drivers believe in running the team round early in the morning "to get the devilment out of them" before loading the wagon. Many hesitate to outspan at midday; they know there may be a long delay before the team is ready to move off again. While some may disagree, I believe it is generally recognised that the coloured man often extracts better work from a mule team on the farm than the farmer himself.

South African farmers now realise that as a draught animal, capable of long spells of ploughing and hauling, the mule may be more economical than a tractor. Great interest is being taken in the mule exhibits at the country shows. Mules, of course, are often sold in carefully - matched pairs - size, weight, "substance" and colour being important points - and a price of £120 for a good pair is by no means uncommon. The mule pulls by the weight of its body; the

shape of the limbs is of secondary importance. The small feet do not suffer on hard roads. The mule becomes useful at four years of age and is still young at sixteen. It is said that no one ever sees a dead mule. Certainly the longevity of the mule and its hardiness in difficult country, are two strong points in its favour.

Kitty, a mule that once belonged to Cecil Rhodes at Groote Schuur, reached the age of thirty-eight years. It spent most of its life at work, and was shot at The Strand in 1936 because of infirmity and blindness. And that is not a South African record. Other mules have probably passed the forty mark.

Some of the Cape districts are peculiarly suitable as mule breeding centres, for they have the limestone formation which is assimilated in the feed and produces bone. As a riding animal, however, the mule is a poor substitute for the horse. The mule's mouth is not so fine, and it has an uncomfortable gait.

The obstinacy of the mule, my veterinary friends tell me, has been exaggerated. With good treatment the mule shows affection for its master and works quietly and patiently, like a donkey, with the vigour and strength of the horse. It has a voice of its own, a hoarse sound which is feeble compared with the famous kick (or bite) by which the mule displays resentment. The horse usually gives some warning before it kicks, but the mule kicks out in all directions with alarming suddenness. It is remarkable that two such docile creatures as the horse and the donkey should have produced an animal which can be as difficult as the mule.

Mules are less liable to lameness than horses. They do not suffer to the same extent from stomach complaints, and they flourish on inferior feed. Mules are more delicate when very young than the pure-bred offspring of either the horse or the donkey, but less prone to equine disorders when they grow up. Veterinary surgeons prefer mules to horses as patients.

Some say the mule is more intelligent than the horse. When given the chance to roll in the sand, a pack of mules will enjoy themselves; whereas uncontrolled horses often kick and fight.

The Cape has seen a revival in the mule-breeding industry in recent years. In the past there were few lands in the world more famous for sturdy mules than the Cape. Mules from the Malmesbury district served in India during the Mutiny, and regular shipments were made for the Indian Army long afterwards. Thousands of mules were shipped from the Union to East Africa during the First World War, but I do not think one mule returned. That campaign brought South Africa's mule population to a low figure indeed; and the spread of motor transport started the decline of mule breeding.

Experts say that the South African mule of today is equal to the finest in the world. It is a little lighter than the American mule, but as a draught animal it cannot be surpassed. When there was a mule shortage in the Union in 1936 hundreds of fine large mules, up to sixteen hands in height,

were brought from the Argentine pampas. The mule-breeding industry recovered during the war, and thousands were sent from the Union to Yugoslavia and Greece in 1946 to aid recovery in those countries. Italian muleteers, former prisoners-of-war, travelled in charge of these consignments - the first ever exported to Europe.

Two young ex-service students of Stellenbosch University came to my stoep last summer to borrow a map. I have a collection of maps and charts, and this fifty-year old map shows every farm and watering-place along the coast from Table Bay northwards to Namaqualand.

I lent the map gladly, for I knew they would have a tale to tell on their return. They set out on horseback from Blaauwberg Strand carrying sleeping bags, food and fodder and water-bottles. They followed the beaches, covering between twenty and thirty miles a day; their ride lasted a fortnight and cost them £5 10s. apiece.

On one lonely beach they picked up a bottle with a message from two girls in a South African liner homeward bound after a holiday in Britain. The girls asked the finders of the message to write to them; and they got a reply with a snapshot of the horsemen.

I cannot say that the students rode to romance, but all the farmers welcomed them and they seldom slept on the veld. If they had not chosen to visit hotels in a few places the ride would have cost them next to nothing.

At Lambert's Bay, about 150 miles north of Cape Town, the students turned inland and rode through the little-known Sandveld. It was much hotter inland, for the beaches were always cool; but they were seeking a new route. As they were both students of agriculture, they found much to interest them during the ride. "Travel light" was the advice they gave to others planning a similar ride.

I have mentioned this little episode as an example which others may wish to follow. "The

right place for a man is in the saddle,” advised General Smuts in another of those open-air speeches which I enjoy. The saga of the saddle forms no mean part of the Cape cavalcade.

George Thompson, the Cape Town merchant who explored the North-West Cape in the 'twenties of last century, was a great horseman. He filled his holsters with “brandy bottles in lieu of pistols” and wore a shooting jacket of his own design. It had eight pockets, containing a compass, thermometer, burning glass, eau de cologne and four volumes of English poetry “for occasional recreation.” Thompson also carried a sealskin cap for cold weather and a straw hat for the heat.

Thus equipped, he “left behind civilised man and once more found myself with a mingled feeling of awe and exultation a traveller in the waste and solitary wilderness.” Thompson wrote the first detailed descriptions of the Aughrabies Falls and the Cango Caves. Those were great days for the adventurous rider.

Horsemen were not forgotten in the Almanacs published in Cape Town fairly regularly last century. The 1833 issue of the “South African Almanac and Directory” contains shrewd advice for the benefit of travellers on horseback in the countryside.

“He should arm himself with a small vessel of right good cognac and a few biscuits to assist him upon his fatiguing journey,” says the writer, “Let him also add some snuff to make friends with the elder ladies, the way to their hearts lying through their nostrils; and a stock of sweet smiles and small-talk for the younger ones, well garnished with tales of love and marriage, the great object of their lives; and, if possible, a smattering of Dutch to maintain a conversation with the good man about his wines and his wagons, his cattle and his kraals.

“The sojourner will find gratuitous and uncommon hospitality. He will traverse a country arrayed in all the wildness of untamed nature and be witness to the simple manners and unsophisticated habits of a fine race of people.”

It is said the horses Van Riebeeck imported from Batavia a year after his arrival were the first to be seen at the Cape, but this is not entirely accurate. There is proof that a solitary horse was observed in Table Valley among the herds of zebra and quagga some years before the Dutch settlement was established. It was a savage horse, carrying the remnants of a rope halter, too wild to be caught. The origin of that horse, however, has never been traced.

No doubt horses would have found their way down to South Africa from the north but for the horse-sickness from which the zebras were immune. As it was, Van Riebeeck had to appeal to the Batavian authorities in these words: "Horses are as necessary to us at the Cape as bread in our mouths." He got his horses.

The thirty directors of the Dutch East India Company at one time suggested that the colonists at the Cape should capture and tame quaggas, and "by further breeding help themselves," rather than lean on exports from Holland. This interesting experiment was never

attempted. There is no quagga blood in our horses.

Late in the seventeenth century the breed deteriorated, however, and had to be revived by stallions of Persian blood. Almost a century later South America sent stallions to the Cape. They, too, were of Oriental blood, and were described as being "highly esteemed for their beauty, gentleness and good service."

It was in 1782 that the first stallions were imported from England, eight thoroughbreds of Oriental descent. Great progress was made when Lord Charles Somerset was Governor of the Cape; he was a fine judge of horse-flesh, and there was more than a suspicion, that he made a good thing out of it.

Connoisseurs of horse-flesh in the 'thirties of last century spoke with reverence of the "Hantam" breed. These horses came from the stud of a farmer named Pienaar, who had secured his foals from stallions brought to the Cape by Lord Charles Somerset and had maintained a good

standard. But the demand in the country in those days was for a strong horse with staying power - one that could do sixty miles a day in an emergency.

Cape families who did much to improve the Cape breed were the Van Reenens, the Kirstens and the Melcks. Those names appear in the first stud book of 1808; and sires from those famous stables were purchased by horse-breeders all over the colony.

Colonel Apperley, a remount officer at the Cape, paid this tribute: "Cape horses are peculiar animals. I admit they are not handsome; but they surpass any horse I have seen out of Europe in their untiring and unflinching endurance during the longest and hottest days of the year."

Few people know that an Afrikaner once gained the title of "champion rider of the world." It happened after the South African War, when Commandant Ben Coetzee settled in the United States rather than take the oath of allegiance.

In the summer of 1904 a World's Fair was held in New York, and Buffalo Bill challenged the

horsemen of the world to appear there and compete for the championships. Ben Coetzee rode the most vicious bronchos the Americans could produce and won the trophy - a gold medal in the form of a horse-shoe with seven diamonds mounted on seven nails.

Those who prefer walking to riding may find inspiration in the journey of Mr. A. H. Crundall, a retired bank clerk, who covered six thousand miles in the Union with six pack-donkeys. I met Mr. Crundall when he reached Cape Town at the end of 1946. He had been on the road for two-and-a-half years.

I shall be well pleased if I can walk as far and look as fit at the age of 57 as Mr. Crundall did. He was a bronzed muscular, walking tribute to the open-air life. He always spent his holidays camping, and when he retired he had already planned this gigantic trek. It cost him about £10 a month, and he saw more of the Union's by-ways than others see in a lifetime.

The donkeys carried enough to make camping comfortable, and fed themselves most of the time. Mr. Crundall aimed at covering ten miles a day, and his longest day's march was eighteen miles. When he found himself in pleasant surroundings he sauntered along at the rate of two or three miles a day, taking in the scenery as no motorist can do.

He had in turn a Zulu, Xhosa, Griqua, Pondo and coloured boy to look after the donkeys and cook his meals. Donkey travel seems to be the recipe for a healthy, carefree life.

Mr. Crundall completed his journey from Tzaneen in the Northern Transvaal almost without unpleasant adventures. Once or twice he had uncomfortable moments while crossing river mouths, when the water was not as shallow as it looked and he and the donkeys had to swim for it. Once a tramp tried to rob him of his clothes, but failed. Mr. Crundall passed through lion country without hearing a lion roar; and he encountered innumerable snakes without getting bitten.

Here is a word of advice from Mr. Crundall to others who are thinking of travelling with donkeys.

“Stick to routes where you are sure to find water,” he says. “Keep away from national roads and the Karoo. I hugged the coast all the way from Natal to Mossel Bay. Some of my best days were spent strolling along the beaches at low tide.”

One donkey carried two large pannier baskets with his pots and pans. The second had two boxes of food, the third two boxes of clothing, the fourth carried water tanks and the fifth a tent and blankets. He always kept one donkey in reserve.

During the whole journey Mr. Crundall wore out one pair of military boots. He always carried one army pair for hard roads and two pairs of the veldskoen type for the veld.

A stretcher takes up too much room, so he slept on the ground without any sort of mattress. A waterproof sheet, a strip of hessian, an old

eiderdown and two blankets made up his sleeping equipment. He was nearly always comfortable in the bivouac tent. Once or twice he was washed out in the rainy season; at all other times he greatly preferred the veld to farm-houses at night.

Not that the farmers were inhospitable. But he chose the by-ways and the beaches most of the time. Aiming at ten miles a day, he set off about 8 a.m. in summer and 9 a.m. in winter - always after a good breakfast. He walked practically the whole distance, accepting a lift occasionally when he wanted to visit a village to buy supplies. As a rule he walked for four or five hours a day, then made a camp; had a cup of tea and a biscuit, and ended each day with a good dinner.

Camp sites were sometimes a problem in town or village areas, as the donkeys fed themselves most of the time and everyone does not like donkeys grazing. That is why he remained out in "the blue " as much as possible.

Mr. Crundall found the Irrigation Department's large-scale maps useful in plotting his tracks across roadless country. Every night he wrote up his diary and noted scenery, routes, distances, water supplies and weather. During the whole journey he had one cold and two slight attacks of stomach trouble.

The meal he enjoyed most was the green mealie bread made for him by a trader's wife in Pondoland. She put the mealies through a mincer three times, added baking powder and salt, and boiled the mixture in a dish cloth. It looked like a suet pudding, but served hot with butter it was delicious.

Several roads converge within sight of my stoep, and I can see one by-way that leads into the heart of the Swartland. Many a farm-truck, many a shining limousine races past; but I doubt whether I can hope ever again to see a car such as I used when I first motored away from the city.

It was a Ford Model-T, the only car which has ever gained my affection. I have spent money without a pang on small boats and books, cases of wine and steamship fares; but the inevitable selection of a new motor-car from time to time, and at a high price, finds me in a sombre mood. The finest car salesman in the Cape cannot make me discover romance in the smell of the real leather upholstery or any ingenious detail. I think of a car nowadays more or less as I regard a tin of sardines - something essential, but transitory. One day the gleaming new car will lie rusting in a junk yard, like the opened sardine tin.

With the Model-T it was different. I had not lost the thrill of driving, and I was seeing many corners of the Cape countryside for the first time. Every week-end was an adventure. The miles that rolled and bumped away under the hard, narrow tyres were covered with a degree of uncertainty; each arrival was an achievement; the return on Sunday night was a triumph. One pitted one's skill against the eccentricities of the

Model-T, and every victory over breakdown carried a deep satisfaction.

Owners of that strange breed were a band of brothers. The help they gave you went much further than the courtesy of the road. I remember a Saturday morning when my friends and I reached Paternoster after ploughing through the sand - Paternoster, a thatched village of fishermen with a store and hotel, but without a garage. And we had broken the front spring.

No owner of a Model-T ever escaped breaking that front spring. By its very design it was destined to fracture and clang upon the road surface like the tolling of a bell. Then the high Ford structure sagged and those who rode upon its back felt their spirits sagging with the tortured metal.

Into this dilemma entered a friendly farmer, one of those great souls who have made the remote countryside a friendly land of romance for me. He took charge of the situation. Waving towards the hotel he declared: "Leave this job to me - I

have an old front spring in my loft and a boy who can fix it. You'll get a good lunch at the hotel - leave this to me."

Lunch ended with seaweed jelly, a Paternoster delicacy I had never tasted before. And when we emerged, there was our Ford with the spring fitted, greased and ready for the road. The farmer would accept nothing more than gratitude. Such was the freemasonry of the Ford, but it passed with the Model-T.

A huge technical world of knowledge was wasted when the Model-T vanished from the road. That car was original from dripping radiator to sawn-off stern. Country mechanics were wizards at diagnosing and correcting Model-T faults. Nothing ever baffled them, for every symptom was hideously familiar. I drove into Malmesbury one rainy night with the engine coughing and the feeble Ford lights nearing extinction. It seemed impossible to continue the journey, yet within ten minutes the mechanics had renewed the youth of the whole electric system.

One of my friends, who always accompanied me on these weekend adventures, was a master of improvisation when it came to wayside repairs. His finest hour arrived one Sunday afternoon, shortly after leaving Langebaan. I was at the wheel, and I felt my right foot being scalded. The cylinder gasket was worn out, hot water was spurting through. My friend unpicked the lining of his tie, caulked the leaks, tightened up the cylinder head nuts and we completed the hundred-mile run to Cape Town.

If you told a young motorist that the Model-T was driven by constantly jerking the left thumb, he might not believe it. There was nothing on the dash-board save the grinding austerity of the black paint which Old Man Ford forced all his millions of customers to accept. Most of all we missed an oil-gauge. Once, when a big-end burnt out through lack of oil, we filled up with windmill oil supplied by a farmer and got home.

Many a desperate situation was saved just by allowing the Model-T to cool off. Like the human body, it often cured its own ills. But in the

country, on the roads of those days, it did not pay to hurry. At thirty-five miles an hour you had the sensations of a fun-fair, and your passengers gripped the seven-feet high tent and protested. It is more than twenty years since the last Model-T jittered off the assembly line and now it is only a legendary monster. But those were great days, wonderful times.

CHAPTER 10

TRAVELLERS ON THE ROAD

*I'm a smous, I'm a smous in the wilderness
wide*

*The veld is my home and the wagon's my
pride;*

*The crack of my voorslag shall sound o'er the
lea,*

*I'm a smous, I'm a smous, and the trader is
free!*

SINCE THOSE LINES WERE WRITTEN BY T. FANNIN, the smous, the pedlar of the veld, has become a legendary figure.

Last century many a smous started with pack donkeys and made a fortune. Nowadays it is done with motor-cars and hire purchase contracts - and the goods are different. But the old *smous* goes right back to the time of the Great Trek.

Smous is a corruption of the name Moses, though not every *smous* was a Jew. Afrikaners, Englishmen and shrewd Scots also set out their wares on the farms; and I have discovered references to a type of *smous* known as *Fransmanne* or *Fransies*. They were really Syrians, and they worked the Cape Midlands and Border.

Among the first Jewish traders in the platteland were many men from England and Germany; it was only after the diamond and gold discoveries that Jews arrived from Eastern Europe in large numbers. Then a ship called the Peruvian brought to the Cape a group of Russian and Polish Jews who had failed to make a living in South America under Baron Hirsch's colonization scheme. The ship has departed, but the name lingers.

There died in England not long ago a Mr. Adolf Hesse, and his estate was valued at £226,000. Mr. Hesse was a smous in 1904, selling perfume and other goods from an ox-wagon. Not many of his fellow traders amassed so much; but all over the platteland there are prosperous stores which owe their origin to tireless men who trudged with packs on their backs; then with strings of donkeys; and finally rode with Cape carts and wagons.

In the days when farmers lived in extreme isolation the smous was a welcome visitor. Some of his stock-in-trade might be glittering rubbish; but he also carried useful articles. Knives sold by the wandering smous are still giving service on distant farms. Biblical and other oleographs adorn the walls of farm homesteads. His trinkets survive in jewellery boxes passed down from mother to daughter.

Rolls of cloth and ready-made clothing were always to be found in the pedlar's pack. It is true that some of the garments were out-of-fashion and had been sold off at low prices by Cape

Town merchants. On the farms, however, it was only a matter of price. Bonnets and dresses, calico, cord velveteen for male trousers, knitting wool and reels of cotton were bought eagerly by people who had to trek fifty, even a hundred miles to shop in the dorp.

Craftiest of all these traders was the "gold smous." He specialised in jewellery. When he entered a new district he selected a man of standing, a leading farmer or *ouderling* of the Church, and sold him a fist-class gold watch at far below cost price. That was all the advertisement necessary. After that the smous disposed of scores of inferior rolled gold watches at £5 apiece.

Those were the days when men's watch-chains demanded ornament. Most popular designs were miniature revolvers and penknives. There were rings and brooches and thimbles for the women. And as the smous was often prepared to accept payment in cattle, at the farmer's own valuation, business was done easily. Even the farm

labourers inspected the stock-in-trade, and for them the smous had guitars and mouth-organs.

Another duty of the smous was to bring news of the outside world. The really clever trader carried messages or letters from distant relations, and then displayed goods similar to those which he said the relations had bought from him. After all, if a respected aunt had chosen dress material of a certain pattern, that settled all questions of taste and price.

In the evening, if the smous remained for the night, he and his host would discuss the Old Testament - a guide they had in common. The people of the lonely farms would be sorry to see the smous move on with his desirable goods and the golden sovereigns he had acquired.

The late Sir John Kotze, the distinguished judge, used to tell the story of a Karoo trek he made on circuit last century with the late Sir Thomas Upington. They had a fair amount of baggage on their Cape cart, and one night they outspanned at a farm and were welcomed by the farmer. As

they alighted, the farmer remarked: "You need not unstrap your boxes - we do not require any smous goods just yet." For once Sir Thomas Upington was left speechless.

Some of you who live in the Fraserburg district may remember the retired smous who was so fond of his wagon that he built it into his farmhouse. The living room had a misvloer, but the floor of the wagon formed the roof of the room. All four wheels were let into the walls. And when the old smous climbed the ladder to his bedroom he slept on the familiar *katel* under the wagon tent.

Unwelcome though he is, the tramp has had a long and dreary career in the Cape, and he has received much undeserved hospitality. He took to the road in the Dutch East India Company period, and he is still on the road, still dominated by the same blind impulse to halt nowhere for long and to see nothing out.

In some ways the *voetganger* of a century ago fared better than the modern tramp who rides in limousines and covers a thousand miles within a week. There was probably less chance last century of being turned away hungry. But the wandering ne'er-do-well needed a sound physique in the oxwagon days. He suffered from exposure between the farms, and old newspapers often mentioned the nameless white men who had been found dead on the veld.

One tramp of the 'eighties, however, not only survived but wrote a queer, anonymous pamphlet (now a collector's item) entitled "Six Years of a Tramp's Life in South Africa." He was an educated Englishman, and he describes vividly enough his experiences as waiter, convict guard, farmhand, quarryman, wool washer, store assistant, painter and plumber. And he confesses frankly that he soon passed on, sometimes of his own accord, but usually because he was dismissed for drinking.

Many people took an interest in him, for he was well-mannered and well-spoken. More than once

he was offered a home. More than one girl showed signs of compassion and affection. He pays tribute to their beauty in his story; he took what they gave and moved on.

According to this writer, there were thousands of tramps on the road at that time. "Scores of those perambulating with me," he wrote, "were my superiors both by birth and education, but as a rule they were worse, infinitely more degraded, than their lower-born associates and were loathed and despised by the latter."

Many of the country "schoolmasters" last century were little better than tramps. Some were men of education; others were deserters from sailing ships or the army, and almost as illiterate as the farm children they taught.

I heard of one old sailor who took to the road and was engaged by a farmer for three months - the full period considered necessary for a complete education. The sailor slung his hammock from the schoolroom rafters and lay there comfortably smoking and lecturing. But he

left suddenly when the farmer discovered that he was teaching the children that the world was round.

Any strict disciplinarian with a loud voice impressed the parents. The usual salary was £5 a month with all found. A number of Hollanders were to be found among those itinerant teachers. Known as “meesters,” they were nevertheless expected to help in the farm work after school hours.

The only text-book on many a farm school was the famous and all-embracing “De Trap der Jeugd” (The Stair of Youth). This admirable volume taught spelling, grammar, writing; it contained singing exercises and sums; and though the geography was mainly confined to Holland, it included a map of the world. It went into every corner of South Africa in ox-wagons. The Voortrekkers taught their children with the aid of the Bible and “De Trap.” It ran successfully from the days of the Dutch East India Company almost to our own times.

Lord Charles Somerset, in spite of many faults, established six schools in the country and imported trained Scottish teachers. It was not until 1839 that a superintendent of education was appointed. He toured the country districts, and discovered that many teachers had not received their salaries and were living on charity. At one mission he visited, the teacher was unable to read or write. Church vestries or barns were being used as schoolrooms.

Boarders at that time paid £2 12s. 6d. a quarter, and one prospectus stated: “Each boarder will be expected to be provided with bedding and a knife, fork and spoon.” The most select school in the country was at Somerset West, where boarders paid £7 10s, a quarter - a fashionable establishment indeed.

Fortunately the parents did not expect much. Even a century ago the youth who could read the Bible, write a letter and count correctly was regarded as a “matriculated” student.

One verse from a book by L. de Beer published in Cape Town fifty years ago will give an idea of the contempt in which the travelling school-master was held:

*An ignoramus, as poor as a rat
With a very old hat,
With very old clothes, and a very red nose,
Breath smelling of gin
(that's a very great sin),
With a very bad shirt, discoloured with dirt,
With socks on his feet
(I can't say tis neat),
With a stick in his hand,
Thus he tramps through the land.*

Mormons first took to the road in the Cape in the 'thirties of last century, only about six years after the founder of the religion, Joseph Smith, had published his "Book of Mormon." And they are still here, though the modern Mormons are noted mainly for their prowess at baseball.

The first Mormon missionaries were so successful that by 1852 they had persuaded a

hundred people at the Cape to join the new Salt Lake City Settlement. A schooner was chartered, and these South African converts departed for America - with what result I cannot trace.

Cape Town resented Mormon activities in those days, for the belief in Mormon polygamy was deep-rooted and there were riots when the missionaries attempted to hold meetings.

Stranger by far were the *Jerusalemangers*, a group of religious fanatics who took part in the Great Trek - not to escape from British rule, but because they wished to reach Jerusalem overland.

It seems that the sect first came to life in Holland, and the members were inspired by Biblical phrases such as "the land of promise" and "the abundance of milk and honey." Dutch *Jerusalemangers* carried the belief to the Cape with them and found Afrikaners ready to share the perils of the journey.

For years they discussed the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and the Great Trek gave them the

stimulus they needed. Some of them lived near the Swartberg in the Prince Albert district; all had vague ideas of geography. It is clear, however, that they imagined the Holy Land to be only a short trek beyond the Transvaal.

A surveyor named K. J. de Kok addressed a gathering of *Jerusalemangers* and tried to dissuade them. He pointed out the dangers of fever and the tsetse fly, warned them of flooded rivers, and hostile tribes, and pointed out that they had no Moses among them to help them across the Red Sea.

They remained unshaken. Tante Mieta, one of their quacks, declared that she had medicines for all tropical ailments. They were prepared to wait until the flooded rivers subsided. If they were attacked, they had guns. As for the Red Sea, they intended to build boats.

There is no knowing what the fate of the *Jerusalemangers* might have been, but their leader, Commandant Ensel, died in the Transvaal and the Trek was abandoned. But they left their

mark on the map. Several towns owe their Biblical names to the *Jerusalemangers*. When they crossed a river to the north of Pretoria they thought they had discovered a tributary of the Nile. So they called it Nylstroom, and the name has survived.

Gipsies are newcomers in South Africa. A band of them under the leadership of Smith John landed in East Africa in 1928 and drifted down overland to the Cape. If there were gipsies in our country before that I can find no mention of them.

According to Romany law, the first gipsy to enter a country becomes the king of all the gipsies who follow. Smith John was born in Spain, but his father was a Rumanian gipsy; and

⁸ Since these lines were printed I have found a record of a band of gipsies from South America who landed in Cape Town in 1906. The "Cape Argus" devoted a page of pictures to them.

all the gipsies in the Union speak the Rumanian language. Even the South African native servants who travel with these gipsies speak Rumanian now.

They are wealthy, the gipsies who have chosen to wander under the South African stars. No horse-caravans for them. They have expensive motor-cars, and sleep under canvas simply because that way of life is almost a religion with them.

Since the arrival of Smith John more than twenty years ago, the gipsy people have split up into two separate "tribes." Most of them were roaming overseas when the war cut them off; Smith John is still in the United States with his wife; but Smith John is still the gipsy king of South Africa. The others say he will return one day. Certainly he will not settle down anywhere.

I first saw these gipsies on Blaauwberg beach, of all places - the vivid women in their rainbow skirts going from cottage to cottage offering to tell fortunes. Never before had I seen gipsies

within sight of Table Mountain. They were as foreign, against that background, as a band of Eskimos would have been.

The men are fine musicians with piano-accordions, but no one can bind them to a long contract. No doubt they retain their skill with horses and as tinkers; but they are gipsies and they work only at intervals, when they are in the mood.

So closely related are the gipsy "tribes" in South Africa that the young men and girls must go abroad to marry. Wherever they go they will find people speaking their own Romany language, observing the same customs, carrying out the same ceremonies at birth, marriage and death. Everywhere there will be the same tzigane melodies round the samovars and charcoal fires.

Mysterious people indeed. If they are of Hindu origin, as some believe, they are utterly different from all the Hindus I have seen. I saw their gay tents beside the road to Muizenberg not long ago. They must have travelled far since the day I

met them on Blaauwberg beach, and I expect it will be a long time before I find them at Blaauwberg again.

CHAPTER 11

FRUIT OF THE CAPE

BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS, on the last farm in the Banhoek valley, I talked not long ago to the last of the Cape fruit industry's pioneers. He is Mr. A. C. Buller of Dwarsriviershoek, and if I knew what Mr. Buller knows about fruit, my young orchard would look more impressive.

Mr. Buller started fruit farming in his valley in 1898. He found a few hundred trees bearing fruit which was unsuitable for export; and he had to send to Europe and America for the types that would stand the voyage in cold storage. Mr. Buller's farm was infested with baboons and leopards fifty years ago. It is only forty miles from Cape Town; but he trapped twenty-six leopards.

In those days most farmers grew fruit mainly for their own use, and there was hardly a

commercial orchard in the Cape. Only grapes were grown in large quantities. Up in the Hex River valley men like Pickstone, Malleson and Dicey were persuading the farmers to plant fruit trees. Hex River was a cattle area; the farmers had prospered during the long period when wagons passed through their valley on the way to Kimberley.

The export pioneers had to travel round packing apricots at Wellington; peaches at Paarl and Stellenbosch; grapes, peaches and pears at Constantia. No one knew anything about packing for export. Mr. Buller remembers packing grapes in cork dust in twenty-pound boxes; but the dust stuck to the grapes. Peaches fetched several dollars each in New York, and they went in cotton wool.

Early shipments were stowed in the steward's compartments with the ship's food. Once the stevedores at Table Bay Docks went on strike; so Mr. Buller and other early exporters from Drakenstein put the fruit on board the old R.M.S. Norman themselves. There was so little that they

could handle the lot. Mr. Buller lived to see two million boxes of grapes exported in one year.

The founder of the Cape fruit industry, of course, was Hendrik Boom, the gardener who arrived with Van Riebeeck. If he had failed, many more of the Dutch settlers would have died of scurvy. Boom had to succeed in spite of gales and droughts. The first showers after Van Riebeeck's landing fell on May 23, and Boom planted fruit trees, raised peas, beans and spinach, and collected wild asparagus and sorrel on the veld.

Some of the first fruit trees came from the older settlement on St. Helena, and Van Riebeeck sent for more. It is on record that the ship *Nachtglas* brought a consignment in 1654, and among the trees was a peach which was lost and rediscovered in recent years. This came about while the Stellenbosch University experts were searching the world for the peach most suitable for canning. They imported many varieties, but not one was entirely satisfactory. One day Professor O. Reinecke visited a peach orchard at Kakamas on the Orange River, and at last

discovered the ideal canning peach. Though it is known as the Kakamas peach, it was found to be identical with the St. Helena peach imported by Van Riebeeck. It is a yellow cling variety.

Van Riebeeck had more than a thousand fruit trees established on his farm Bosheuvel in 1661 - orange, apple, pear, plum and walnut. The following year the first ripe apples were picked; they were of the "Dutch Wine" variety.

Many of the Huguenots had been fruit farmers, and they were the first at the Cape to make dried fruit. Simon van der Stel encouraged this new industry, for dried fruit was welcome on board scurvy-stricken ships. The Huguenots also produced the first mebos, crystallised figs and sugared fruits. And their Cape raisins were in great demand in Holland and England centuries ago.

They made jam mainly from apricots in the early days, boiling the fruit over slow fires in huge copper pots. Jam was kept in pots and covered with paper smeared with fat. The modern jam

industry began about a century ago. Even then the glass jar with parchment cover was the usual container. Tins came much later.

Cherries were grown by old Hendrik Boom, but they must have died out. It was not until the end of last century that cherries were seen again in the Cape - and then they were regarded as such novelties that people in Cape Town paid a penny each for them as button-holes. The pioneer cherry farmer was the late Mr. Van der Merwe, who planted an orchard of black Californian cherries at the top of Gydo Pass above Ceres. This is one of the rare spots where snow falls and encourages the growth of cherry trees. Cherries fetch more for their weight than any other fruit on the market. Miss Emmeria van der Merwe, who took over her father's farm, is the "Cherry Queen" of the Cape.

*Die waat' la-moen, die waat' la-moen,
Hier's 'n lekker waat' la-moen.
So rooi as bloed, so suiker soet,
Hier's 'n lekker waat' la-moen.*

Van Riebeeck had hardly landed when he wrote to Batavia for watermelon seeds. Today it ranks with the grape and the peach as one of the most popular fruits of the Cape.

Those who hesitate to buy watermelons are mainly influenced by the difficulty of finding a ripe one. Some people regard it as too much of a gamble. The time-honoured method of holding it on the head and "crunching" is not always reliable.

Certain shrewd housewives prefer the broom test. You take a broom-straw about eight inches in length and balance it crosswise on the watermelon. If it is green the straw will remain stationary; a ripe melon causes the straw to swing round slowly.

But the Cape Malays have another method, which was described to me by Hadjie Bakaar Manuel of Simonstown. "You must test not only for ripeness, but for flavour," he pointed out. "Look for sugar spots - rough splotches on the skin and small marks like healed scars. These

marks are made by insects trying to reach the sugar in the melon. They never attempt to pierce a poor specimen. Never choose a watermelon with a smooth, shiny skin.”

Snap your finger on a watermelon. A heavy “plunking” sound denotes ripeness, while a thin noise means it is green. Press the melon with both hands outspread. A ripe melon will “give” slightly. These tests, with “sugar spots” (Hadjie Bakaar assures me) are infallible.

I am told that the finest watermelons are grown in the North-West Cape. Experts say that the Boland melons imbibe too much water, and the flavour suffers. Namaqualand produces the geelvleis or geelkroon watermelons, with delicious yellow flesh.

The largest watermelons, I fancy, come from the Hex River valley. During the 1946 season one watermelon grown by Mr. Conradie was weighed at Sandhills railway station - 120 pounds. Soviet Russia claimed a world record in 1947 with a 125 pound watermelon; but the Hex

River farmers are positive that larger watermelons have been grown in their valley.

As a study in fruity beauty the watermelon has appeared on many a canvas. The vivid green rind shading into a delicate tint, the roseate pulp and black seeds - these colours are fit indeed for an artist’s brush. The watermelon also inspired an early Afrikaans poet, Advocate W. H. Maskew of Cape Town. As far back as 1888 he wrote:

*Ag, watermeloen - so sag as ’n soen,
Jy smelt sommer weg in myn mond,
So wit en so rooi; jij is amper te mooi,
Mij tijd, d’ pitte spring rond!*

But I have still to learn how to cut a watermelon. Any mention of this point usually starts a controversy. Do you follow the natural stripes - or cut across?

Finest oranges in South Africa come from the Olifant’s River valley, the famous Clanwilliam oranges with their perfect colour and flavour.

Age counts in the orange tree. The older the tree, the smaller is its fruit, the thinner the skin and the greater its sweetness. Spain and China have very old trees; some in China are believed to have borne fruit for six centuries. But the Olifant's River valley comes next in seniority, well above California.

There is an orange tree more than two centuries old on Mr. Dirk Visser's farm Hexrivier, near Citrusdal. Dr. Raimund Marloth, the government expert, fixed the age not long ago by examining the bark. The tree has four trunks, with the original, rotted trunk still to be seen in the middle. Mr. Visser has seventeen thousand orange trees, but the oldest rival does not appear to be more than a century and a half. It was in 1804 that a Jesuit missionary planted the first orange grove in California; so that even Mr. Visser's second-oldest tree was probably bearing oranges before the Californian missionary gathered his fruit. As for Palestine, the thick skins and large oranges proclaim the youth of the industry.

I must add, however, that orange trees found in the Rhodesian bush are far older than any in the Olifant's River valley. Portuguese explorers planted oranges in Rhodesia in the sixteenth century.

Dr. Brehm, a Uitenhage botanist, was responsible for the first seedless oranges coming to the Cape. He read in an overseas agricultural journal of this wonderful novelty growing at Bahia in Brazil, and wrote at once asking for cuttings. The same idea occurred to an American agricultural official; and soon afterwards a third request arrived in Brazil from Australia. All three countries were supplied from the same tree. Only in California did the transplanted shoots prosper. Nowadays the Olifant's River valley has its own seedless seedling orange, the "Clanor," developed by Dr. Nortier of bush tea fame.

Oranges become scarce in the Cape in January. You have to wait until April for this form of Vitamin C to arrive from the Transvaal; but then the supply lasts for a long period. Clanwilliam oranges reach the market at the end of May and

last for about two months. The Katberg crop comes in June and goes on until August. Small growers in various parts of the Cape try to fill the gaps, but many of them produce (under adverse conditions) the sort of oranges which you see held up to ridicule in the newspapers, photographed with match-boxes providing a fair idea of size.

Citrus ranks as the Union's third most valuable export commodity - an industry in which at least £25,000,000 has been invested. It has known many vicissitudes, but it is no longer necessary to preach the old Brazilian proverb to customers: "A physician is not needed in a house where orange peel lies strewn about."

The fruit industry has its acknowledged "kings," and Mr. M. C. Minaar of De Hoek, Paarl, is the olive king of the Cape.

More than three-quarters of a century ago his father received number of small olive trees as a gift from a Montagu farmer. He thought little of them, and almost decided to throw them away. But today there are eight thousand olive trees

flourishing on De Hoek and yielding a forty-ton annual crop.

The Huguenots grew olives. Fruit experts last century noted the vigorous wild olive plantations near the Cape coast and tried to encourage olive cultivation. Wild olive fruit has a low oil content; but the trees can be used as stocks for the cultivated varieties.

Farmers were not enthusiastic, for there seemed to be no market for olive oil. Moreover, you have to wait six or seven years for a crop. Early this century, however, a group of Italians settled in Paarl, constructed a primitive press, and extracted oil from the De Hoek trees. Before that the olives had gone to feed the pigs and turkeys.

As far back as 1907 De Hoek olives won a gold medal at a London show for the finest and purest olive oil produced within the British Empire. Only in recent years, however, have olives become really profitable. An Italian has set up a modern plant - near Paarl and has three thousand



You have to wait six or seven years for a crop of olives.

trees. One day the Western Province may be covered with groves of olives. The hot areas to the north of Clanwilliam are also suitable, and you can see olive trees, green all the year round, growing in the streets of Van Rhynsdorp.

Olives will grow on sandstone koppies or weathered granite. The vine may one day have a rival.

Strawberry king of the Cape is Mr. Jurie van Dyk of Bloubokkiesfontein in the Napier district. His crop of seven tons a year is, in fact, the largest in the Union. Every season Mr. van Dyk plants half a million strawberry plants, and his return is £1000 a morgen.

Mr. van Dyk makes no secret of his methods. He concentrates on three varieties - Ox Heart, White Heart and Ever Bearing No. 2 and sends plants all over the Union. Eight strawberries of the Ox Heart variety weigh one pound. Three bird watchers crack whips over the precious strawberry beds.

Oom "Ford" Kritzinger is the Cape's apple king. His father planted the first apple trees in the Langkloof, Uniondale district. Now the Langkloof output is a million boxes a year.

Oom "Ford" by the way, gained his nickname because he was the first man in the district bold

enough to invest in the old Ford Model-T. After some experience of that memorable motorcar he sent a box of apples to Henry Ford - and added details of improvements which he hoped to see embodied in future Ford cars.

Henry Ford wrote back to say that he had enjoyed the apples; evidently Mr. Kritzinger knew all about growing apples. "You can leave making motor-cars to me," added Mr. Ford. "I know all about that."

Graaff-Reinet claims the "king" of all vines in South Africa - some declare it is the largest grape vine in the world. Planted early last century by one of the famous Murrays, the Dutch Reformed Church ministers, the vine is to be seen in the grounds of Reinet House, the historic old parsonage.

The gnarled trunk has sent up branches which cover a stoep fifty feet in length. The girth of the stem is six feet. It still yields fine black grapes, though the vine was saved with difficulty from decay about twelve years ago. This aged vine is

certainly larger than the celebrated Hampton Court vine.

Tropical fruits, including bananas, grow in odd corners of the Cape. No one knows where the first South African bananas came from; but it is possible that they travelled overland centuries ago from Abyssinia. The bananas of Natal were imported from China (like the loquat) in fairly recent years.

Mauritius supplied our first mangoes in 1875. Mangoes were taken to the island by seventeenth century Hindu settlers. Guavas and avocado pears came to South Africa by the same circuitous route (via India and Mauritius) towards the end of last century.

Both mangoes and guavas have been improved upon in their new home. Government horticulturists have evolved a mango which can be eaten as easily as an apple. The unwieldy pip has been reduced to the size of a penny, and the skin

comes away neatly from the turpentine-flavoured flesh.

Guavas are rich in vitamin-C, which is retained when the fruit is stewed or canned. But guavas have too many pips for complete enjoyment. So the experts are creating new varieties with fewer pips, thin skins, luscious flesh and attractive colour.

Other comparatively new fruits in South Africa are granadillas, sultana grapes, persimmons and pawpaws. Van Riebeeck sent for pineapples; but if he received them, they did not survive the Cape climate. The present pineapple industry in the Cape is not yet a century old.

Sub-tropical fruit is booming. The value of the trade in all fruit trees in the Union is officially estimated at £2,000;000 a year. About half the Union's nurserymen are in the Western Cape. Throughout the country, about twenty million trees a year are sold.

Strangest orchards in the Cape, I am sure, are those to be found scattered along the railway

lines between the fence and the sleepers. They were "planted" by thousands of fruit-eating passengers who threw stones and pips out of train windows.

Many a pip took root in well-watered embankments. Gangers nurtured the little trees; and when they grew up, lopped off branches which might have brushed against passing trains.

So you find apples, peaches, plums, apricots, pears and other varieties on railway property. And in gangers' cottages, you may notice rows of bottled fruits and jams provided by these well protected, carefully-tended trees.

Fruit pips provide floors in the Cape, though the mixture of ant-hill clay and cow-dung is far more common. Nevertheless, the peach-pip floor is still to be found on some farms. It takes thousands of pips to cover even a rondavel floor, and the surface is liable to be slippery. Such floors are burnished with oxblood, and are relics of more leisurely days. The work involved is a strong deterrent.

“Vrugte beteken gesondheid,” as the railway menus used to remind us. “Fruit means health” - provided it does not cause “apricot sickness.” This is an inevitable complaint during the fruit season, and doctors beg to differ about both cause and treatment. One thing is certain. *“Appelkoossiekte”* may attack people who have never touched an apricot.

Dr. A.. L. de Jager of Paarl believes that “apricot sickness” is due to a virus which escapes from the soil and is distributed by the wind. The illness gained its name because apricots were the first spring fruits which the early Cape farmers produced. They suffered from the familiar griping pains and diarrhoea, and rightly blamed the apricots. Later it was discovered that other fruits, vegetables and salads could cause the same symptoms.

Some doctors advocate castor oil. Others say that repeated doses of salts will clear the poison out of the system. I have a personal interest in this medical controversy, for during every fruit season I fall an easy victim to “apricot sickness.”

Nowadays I find consolation in the fact that this Cape epidemic is mild compared with the sickness that spreads over the sweltering land of Egypt when the first dates of the season appear. It is the same complaint from the Cape to Cairo - but in Cairo my pains were far more severe, and lasted longer.

*By little wings and busy feet,
In garner's amber, passing sweet,
A summer day is prison'd.*

As I rose to the surface of my dam today after the first dive, I found angry bees round my head. Not a whole swarm, but enough to make me nervous.

They had been sheltering in the cool, moist, outlet pipe. I had driven them out by the surge of water that followed my dive; and now I had to watch them warily. As soon as I had dressed I tracked the bees to the blue-gum trees beyond my fence. And there, in a secluded corner of the plantation, were the hives.

Beekeeping has a strong fascination for many city people, and I know several men who plant their hives in likely places in the country and visit them at week-ends. Frankly, I like the honey more than the hives, though I cannot resist the mysterious lore of the bee world.

Every year I buy honey in the comb from a most unlikely source. The home-made hives stand on a dune in the village of Blaauwberg Strand - in the teeth of the south-easter only a few yards from the sea. Yet this is magnificent honey. The secret lies in the veld behind the village, where the bees feed on the spring Powers. These nectars form the perfect blend for my palate.

The honey epicure can find a wide range of flavours. Oudtshoorn, the greatest honey-producing district in the Union, sends out lucerne honey to the tune of £60,000 a year. This is so light in appearance that it can hardly be distinguished from water. Blue gums yield the colour of red wine; prickly pear honey is still darker, and tastes like treacle; buckwheat honey is brown; while other crops are responsible for

white honey like condensed milk and black, granulated honey. Indeed, there are scores of varieties. Mango honey is rare, and the memory of it lingers. Probably the most astounded bee-keeper in the Cape was the man who put one of his hives close to a sweet factory. His combs yielded honey with a peppermint flavour, and it took him a long time to trace the flavour to its source.

Willows, orange and lemon blossoms, sun-flowers, peas, beans, mignonette and clover all feed the bees. The spekboom, a green bush with pink flowers; stimulates great honey flows after rain, and the honey is of high quality. Bees also love the evening primrose flower, which opens so late that the bees have to find their way home in the dark.

You can keep honey, if you store it carefully, for half a century, and then discover that it has matured like wine. Not many honeys are poisonous, but there is a red-hot honey from the euphorbia which may cause unpleasant symptoms. Certain aloes give the honey a bitter

taste. But there is no doubt that the ordinary honeys are good for you. It really is possible to live for months on milk and honey, though an occasional tomato or orange should be thrown in to make the diet complete.

Honey is good for you because it is so digestible. It creates energy, for a pound of honey has a higher caloric value than any other food except dates. Those who cannot take cane sugar because of the effect on the kidneys can eat honey with impunity. It prevents colds, it is mildly laxative, and it aids weak hearts. Try a spoonful of honey in hot milk on a winter morning and face the bitter day without fear.

Yet we do not eat enough honey and we certainly allow much honey to go to waste by failing to keep enough bees. A government expert recently estimated that South Africa is losing £8,000,000 a year in this way. Honey production has trebled in the past thirty years to 1,500,000 pounds a year; but millions upon millions of bees are still going begging for hives.

There would be many more bee-keepers, I suppose, if stingless bees were available. An insect which can kill a man with its sting must be treated with respect. I once lost a friend that way - a man with a fine record, in war and peace, as an air pilot.

Doctors call it anaphylactic shock. Anaphylaxis is the opposite to immunity; a susceptible person, having been stung once, becomes far more vulnerable than the normal person. One more tiny injection of foreign protein, such as bee-sting, may cause death.

I knew a bee-keeper at Milnerton years ago who treated his rheumatism with bee-stings. He told me, however, that he had the utmost difficulty in persuading the bees to sting him. Doctors use artificial stings, and they first anaesthetize the arthritic joint. Such injections apparently stimulate the production by the body of defensive substances which combat the poisonous, undefined protein of arthritis.

Bees only become vicious when they have something to protect. An expert told me that he dared not handle his own bees at the wrong season, when food was scarce, or when the young queens were being reared. Frustrated bees often sting; so that when rain washes away the nectar from the flowers and the bees return with empty stomachs, the shrewd bee-keeper stays away from his hives.

“Bees have their good and bad days, just like human beings,” remarked a Parow beekeeper. “One day I was attacked by my tameest colony, and I counted seventy-three stings in my face and arms. A hot towel is the best treatment. Take an old bachelor’s advice - a bee is like a woman. When handling bees, keep quiet, don’t run, be kind to them - and as a rule they will offer you nothing but sweetness.”

Most bee-keepers seem to build up an immunity to bee-stings. They feel the pain, but the after-effects are not serious. When a bee stings, a peculiar odour is released. You may not notice it, but other bees certainly will; and that is often the

cause of a mass attack by the whole excited hive. Queens, by the way, do not sting human beings. They reserve their barbed lancets for rival queens or princesses.

I often wondered why so many bee-keepers worked with bare hands, and often without even the protection of a veil. One of them explained to me, however, that it was delicate work; the veil was too hot and interfered with the vision, while gloves dulled the sense of touch.

Swarming bees seldom sting. No one really knows why they swarm, but there are theories. It may be due to overcrowded hives; or a surplus of drones may start the mass migration. At such times they cluster round their queen in all sorts of unexpected places. All you can do is to telephone the nearest bee-keeper. He will welcome the call and hasten to remove the swarm.

Paarl has a bee-keeper who has gone to far corners of the Western Province to collect unwanted swarms. He is Mr. Hennie Malan, and

they call him the “King of Bee Stings.” Mr. Malan has been stung so often that he has built up an immunity - like a snake park attendant. One of his most difficult tasks was the removal of a swarm which had lived for many years in an ancient oak near the Dutch Reformed Church at Noorder Paarl. The oak was felled at last, but the bees clung to their home. Mr. Malan had to saw off a five-foot section of the trunk and take it to a farm. Then the trunk had to be sawn again before he reached the swarm.

Stingless bees are found in South Africa, and attempts are being made overseas to breed a useful race of stingless bees. At present the stingless bee found in the wild state is a miserable creature about the size of a housefly, unable to produce more honey than it needs for its own purposes. Another variety of bee, the “apis unicolor” of the Cape coast, has been flown to Russia for observation. Under the right conditions this bee can produce egg-laying worker bees. At present the “apis unicolor” is an

unwelcome bee, for no queen can rule this undisciplined variety.

Huguenot bee-keepers brought Italian “queens” to the Cape. For centuries before that the Hottentots had been robbing the hives of the wild black bees; and now you will find a cross between the docile Italian bee and the original evil-tempered black bee at large on the veld. The most common breed in the Cape is the golden Italian bee, large and strong but seldom vicious.

In the more remote districts of the Cape, far from the Western Province orchards, there are farmers who gather and sell honey without having a hive on their farms. When the haakdoring bush comes in full bloom round Prieska, for example, everyone knows that nests of honeycomb will soon fill rocky crevices and aardvark burrows. Such nests yield enormous cakes of honey weighing up to three hundred pounds. In June the bees start work; in October they are smoked out and the cutting begins.

Enormous nests are found in the mountains, nests where the bees are seldom disturbed for centuries at a stretch. I once heard a true tale of one of these old mountain hives in the lonely range separating the Karoo from the Roggeveld, about sixty miles from Calvinia.

About a hundred years ago a Bushman noticed one of these hives in a cleft far up the face of a sheer precipice. The recovery of that honey became his great aim in life. Again and again he climbed, only to retire defeated. In desperation he risked too much and fell ninety feet to the ground.

He was five miles from his camp, and he crawled there, in six days, along a dry river bed. Honey collected previously from another nest, and a little water, kept him alive. Crippled though he was, he lived to a great age. No one has ever reached the hive in that precipice.

I heard of another of these inaccessible nests which was reached by an ingenious farmer who built a stone platform and then devised a series

of connecting ladders fastened to the cliff by wires, ropes and iron pegs. It was a dare-devil escapade, but he scaled his rickety ladders and filled bucket after bucket with honey. Finally he took a spade with him and cut away tons of honey, the hard sugary lumps known as *sandsuiker*.

That was long ago. The ladders fell, and no one felt equal to imitating the crazy feat. A later owner of the farm, however, discovered that he could secure a certain amount of honey by firing his rifle into the wax and catching the thin golden stream in basins placed far below.

Such hives are often shared by snakes, which are attracted by the warmth. This is an additional risk for honey robbers to bear in mind. The safest time for such an adventure, I am told, is at the height of a hailstorm. Bees are afraid of hail and do not venture out. Nevertheless, it is possible to risk too much for the sake of honey, and I am content to leave the fabulous mountain hives to Bushmen and bold farmers.

Much wild honey is gathered because honey means honey beer. Coloured people in the Piketberg Sandveld still make it every year, and they prefer honey cakes containing young bees. That, they say, starts the fermentation properly. They use *kareemoer*, a powdered root, as yeast; and when water is added there is a strong drink such as primitive people made in many lands when the world was young.

Many a gatherer of wild honey is aided by the honey guide. This insistent and uncanny brown or grey bird calls on human beings to rob the hive it cannot break into itself. There is no mistaking the honey guide's meaning. Its call is loud and not to be denied. When the honey is reached the note changes, and the bird remains close at hand, teetering with anxiety and greed. Bushmen and Hottentots always leave a share of the honey for the honey guide. They say it is a vindictive bird which will lead the way to a snake or a leopard next time if it is cheated.

Chief enemies of the bee-keeper are bees-bees from one hive or wild nest seeking easy honey in

another hive and striving to take it by force. The orchards that provide nectar are also poisoned by spraying; and that is a serious risk. Certain birds will destroy whole colonies of bees when they come down from the mountains in search of their favourite food. Ants, spiders and moths invade the hives; and the bee pirate, a dreaded insect enemy, lies in wait for tired workers homeward bound with honey. At night the ratel or honey badger emerges from its burrow and tears into hives or wild nests. Said to be the most courageous of all animals, it will cling to its stolen honey and defend it with its life.

I have seen beekeeping defined as "the art of so caring for honey bees that they may be able to produce honey for human use in excess of their own requirements." The modern hive, of scientific design, is less than a century old.

It was only in 1895 that a Cape bee-keeper, Mr. George Paul Davidson, was invited to appear at the first agricultural show in Johannesburg and give the first public demonstrations. He travelled

by train from the Keiskama Valley in the Eastern Province, with his bees in the guard's van.

Someone sat down heavily on a hive and broke the wire gauze covering. The train was in Bloemfontein station. Davidson heard a railway official shouting down the platform: "Where is the owner of the bees?" He dashed to the end of the train and found that the bees from the damaged hive had swarmed into a corner of the van.

Davidson had no smoker, so he borrowed a soup ladle from the station restaurant and scooped the bees back into the hive. He said afterwards that he would have used his bare hands if it had been necessary. In spite of this difficult interlude the bees reached Johannesburg safely, and Davidson gave the display which has now become so familiar - driving, uniting swarms and transferring bees from boxes to hives.

Beekeeping fascinates all manner of men - priests and printers, schoolmasters and sailors. I am thinking of a clerk when I take you into the

Hopefield district veld to visit the hives I saw there long ago.

This retired clerk lived in a cottage on three acres beside the Zout River at Hopefield and gave all his time to extracting the riches of the bush between the village and the Berg River. He started with English hives, then changed to American, and tended 250 colonies of bees.

His bees enjoyed a wide range, and the honey flow began in October and lasted to December. On the commonage he had his mud-and-wattle bee-house and the first hives. All over the bushveld, protected by the bushes from the wind, were other hives; and he knew every track and goat-path in the wide area north to the river. Here and there were decoy hives waiting for bees in search of shelter. Many a colony he captured in that way, for in this country hollow trees and underground housing are hard to find; and homeless swarms are obliged to take refuge in unfriendly bushes.

Sometimes when he opened his hives in winter he found snakes there - warmth-loving snakes, tolerated by the bees. Sometimes his hives were robbed and burnt and thrown into the river. Yet he was making his bees pay handsomely in the days when honey was 1s. 6d. a pound.

I shall never achieve that man's success, but I am glad to see the bees round my dam. Below the dam are the fruit trees; and the bees, eager for nectar and pollen, will carry the seeds of life from tree to tree. "Busy bees bring bending branches."

CHAPTER 12

LAND OF TRADITION

CUSTOMS DIE HARD, they say. Here in the Cape the good customs and the sound traditions never die. Sometimes the flame of the rich past flickers; but this is a land of continuity and revivals. A land where today shakes hands with yesterday and the centuries are not forgotten.

Oldest of all important country customs is Nagmaal, the quarterly celebration of Holy

Communion. Those living in remote places were usually only able to attend these services. The festival is said to have something in common with Communion "occasions" in lonely parts of Scotland, described by Robert Burns in "Holy Fair." Long before the end of the seventeenth century, farmers in the Stellenbosch district must have been coming in to Nagmaal, for a church was completed there in 1687.

Nagmaal gatherings were naturally greater in the days before motor-cars.⁹ Never again, I suppose, will the wagons form such huge *laers* in the squares of country towns. In the ox-wagon days, Nagmaal often meant leaving the farm for weeks at a stretch. It called for careful planning. There were new clothes to be made, shoes to be mended, *boerebeskuit* and loaves to be baked for

⁹ One of the last villages where Nagmaal is observed in the traditional way is Nieuwoudtville in the North West Cape. In October 1949 there was a large gathering of people in wagons, tents and mat-houses.

the trek, game to be shot, sheep and fowls to be killed. They did not rely on hotels, and no hotel in a village where Nagmaal was celebrated could have dealt with the number of families that arrived four times a year.

On Thursday night and Friday morning the wagons converged on the village. That was the time for greetings, followed by the sale of farm produce and the buying of stores. Friday evening found the people singing hymns in their tents. On the Saturday morning there would be meetings for the discussion of church affairs, with a preparatory service in the afternoon. The Sunday services ended at 4.30 in the afternoon. By that time the last baptism, confirmation, and marriage had been completed. But the wagons remained on the church square until midnight. Old friendships were renewed round the fires. Many a romance started at Nagmaal - the great meeting. Then, in the early hours of Monday morning, the wagons moved out in the moonlight across the empty plains towards the distant farms.

The great Nagmaal gatherings survive in those areas where trekboers still use wagons and are unable to attend church services every Sunday.

The original Dutch Church came to the Cape with Van Riebeeck, and was based on the principles laid down by the General Synod in 1618 at Dordrecht, Holland. It was essentially a puritan and Calvinistic church. The first clergy were paid by the Dutch East India Company; they were provided with free houses and their congregations sent them gifts of game, sheep and fruit.

Early in the nineteenth century the Dutch Reformed Church introduced hymns and broke away from some of the old dogmas. This trend displeased some of the members and led finally to the establishment of a new church, the Gereformeerde Kerk. The people who joined this church became known as "Doppers." President Kruger was a member.

"Doppers" could be distinguished by their clothes, which were old-fashioned - like their

preference for the puritanical religion of the Presbyterian Church of John Knox in Scotland. There was a “Dopper” style of hair-cut, and for a period the word “Dopper” was used derisively. Ninety years have passed since the Rev. Mr. Postma came from Holland as the first “Dopper” minister. There are now many congregations and the church has its own theological college.

Christmas Day has always been a day of devotion at the Cape, and it is hard to find a Christmas custom that is peculiar to the country. I have heard of a special ginger beer which is brewed during Christmas week and served with soetkoekies. And on many farms the head of the family reads the Bible shortly before midnight on Christmas Eve. Then everyone has a glass of wine amid wishes of “Geseënde Kersfees.”

New Year is the day of unrestrained rejoicing. That is the time when whole villages shut up shop; when farms are abandoned save for a few

trusted servants and thousands of country folk make for the seaside.

The urge to spend New Year on some favourite *strand* is typically South African. Places that are deserted during the rest of the year, far beaches all the way from Port Nolloth southwards; eastwards from False Bay, become alive and decked with tents and wagons, horses and happy people. Here is release from the heat, a break in the toil, a great mingling equalled only by the Nagmaal scene. Places unknown to the rest of South Africa, little inlets like Hondeklip and Bamboes Bay, the Olifant’s river mouth and nearby Strandfontein; for a few days the lonely coast rivals the famous resorts. You can see the South African spirit of New Year as close to Cape Town as Blaauwberg and Melkbosch. Not a cottage remains empty at that period; there are families camping in garages rather than miss the fun of those memorable early January days.

Van Riebeeck ruled that no work should be done on New Year’s Day. Governor Isbrand Goske, a genial Commander, went a step further. “To

encourage the Company's slaves," he wrote, "each was presented with a small gift of money and clothing as well as a spoilt piece of tobacco, which generosity did make these poor menials very cheerful and happy." Zacharias Wagenaar ordered the cannon to be fired. But there was a strong south-easter on the first day of 1663, and he recorded in his diary: "Did not dare to discharge the guns on the ramparts as we were afraid of fire, the houses in front of the Fort being thatched with straw."

Nevertheless, many a New Year after that was celebrated with salutes of guns, while the people fired their muskets and the Castle bells pealed. Early in the eighteenth century it had become a custom to fire seventeen guns from the Castle at midnight on December 31.

"New Year's Day was kept with some degree of religious veneration, no business was done, and the shops closed," remarked a diarist at the Cape in 1799. "Even the slaves claim this day as their own, which they spend in riot, noise and drunkenness."

There was revelry in the countryside, much riding from farm to farm. A country diarist noted in 1829 that "this New Year's Day went off quietly, with the exception of the white constables, who were dismissed from government service, being mostly in a state of intoxication at the canteen."

New Year is the time for music and song, the time when the *boere-orkes* is in great demand. Nearly every village in the Cape has its *boere-orkes*, and years ago they really were farmers' orchestras. The basic instruments were the concertina, violin and guitar; though on the farms there was often a mouth organ in place of the concertina.

But the concertina player is the star performer in a *boere-orkes*. The man who can flourish his instruments over his head without missing a note earns wild applause. Drums and banjo have been added in recent years, but wind instruments are uncommon.

A friend who once organised a *boere-orke* told me that his father gave him a few sheep and he bought his first concertina with the money from the wool. He taught himself to play while looking after the flocks of sheep. That was the traditional method of becoming a musician.

In the village the orchestra appeared at meetings of the debating society and concerts after the church bazaar. At farm dances the players really let themselves go. There was no heavy drinking, but it was understood that the musicians required wine from time to time. Members of the orchestra wore a sort of uniform - white flannels and blazers with scarves or rosettes.

At a farm dance the host and hostess always took the floor first as *voordansers*. Often there were so many skilled musicians present that a guitar-player who wished to dance could usually find someone to take his place.

A country dance is often referred to as a *vastrap* or *velsko*. Most of the early writers at the Cape had something to say about the fondness of the people for dancing. Lichtenstein wrote that “the passion was encouraged by the fondness and aptitude of the slaves for playing on musical instruments ... I know many houses in which there is not one of the slaves that cannot play, and where an orchestra is immediately collected together if the young people of the house when visited by their acquaintances like to dance for an hour or two.” And sometimes there was strong disapproval. Landdrost Starrenberg complained to the Governor of the “rank mutiny of the Stellenbosch burghers,” when he found them one evening “beating the drums lustily and unlawfully, with the devil-may-care villagers dancing around.”

Many of the tunes heard at a *vastrap* are nameless, for they are composed on the farms by the players themselves. The tempo mounts as the night wears on, dancers stamp with

enthusiasm and call: “*Laat deurloop dag toe*” (“Play until daybreak.”) And so, to the music of “*Sarie Marais*,” “*Pollie ons gaan Perel toe*” and “*Die dag breek aan*,” the dance indeed goes on until the dawn.

Beyond all doubt, “*Sarie Marias*” is South Africa’s most popular song. There were many who said it should have been selected as the national anthem.

*O bring my terug na die ou Transvaal,
Daar waar my Sarie woon,
Daar onder in die mielies by the groen doring
boom,
Daar woon my Sarie Marais.*

“*Sarie Marais*” was criticised some years ago as a mere “picnic melody.” Professors and music critics hastened to the defence. But Sarie did not need them; not even an Act of Parliament could put an end to her.

The Afrikaans verses tell the simple story of a young fighting man in one of the Boer commandos who is captured by the British and

sent to a prisoner-of-war camp overseas. He longs to return to Sarie Marais, “in the mealies by the green thorn tree,” somewhere in the far-away Transvaal and the vivid song expresses his longing with a touch of genius.

“*Sarie Marais*” appeals strongly to South Africans in exile, and is sung today with fervour in London, New York and wherever South African students and sporting teams gather in other lands. Springbok soldiers brought it to every battlefield.

While it is often difficult to trace a song to its source, the origin of “*Sarie Marais*” is fairly clear. “*Sarie*” was born in South Africa, although her ancestors came from overseas. This is her story:

Mrs. Ela de Wet, wife of Mr. Justice de Wet, of the Transvaal Supreme Court, wrote the words in 1915 with the assistance of Miss Ellaline Roos. She remembered a tune she had heard the commandos singing round their camp fires during the South African War - and old American slave tune called “*Ella Rhee*.” Mrs. de Wet, however, did not follow “*Ella Rhee*” closely, and

Americans who have heard “Sarie Marais” have not detected a similarity.

Some music-lovers declare that “Sarie Marais” resembles a duet in the Italian opera, “Don Giovanni.” A large number of modern melodies, of course, have been based on operatic excerpts, and it seems probable that similarities could be found between classical compositions and any South African music in existence. The view that “Sarie Marais” is sufficiently different to be regarded as a product of South Africa must find considerable support.

“Sarie Marais” in its present form is thus not so old as most people imagine. The first printed copy appeared in 1920, largely as a result of encouragement by General Smuts, and since then South Africans have never tired of the beautiful melody.

It has been suggested by Afrikaans-speaking enthusiasts that some alternative verses in English are all that are necessary to endear the song to both sections in the Union as a national

folk song. I do not think that is necessary. “Sarie Marais” is the richest jewel in South Africa’s treasury of song. Leave her exactly as she is.

Kaatje Kekkelbek, that famous Cape coloured character, has many modern impersonators. Probably few of them realise that Kaatje is now well over a century of age. The original comic song was composed by Messrs. Bain and Rex in 1834 and sung for the first time, amid great applause, at the Grahamstown Amateur Theatre. The first verse went like this:

*My name is Kaatje Kekkelbek
I come from Kat Rivier
Daar is van water geen gebrek
But scarce of wine and beer.
Mijn ABC in Ph’lipe’s school
I learnt a kleine beetje
But left it just as great a fool
As geeke Tante Mietje.*

Almost in the same class as Sarie - more amusing, perhaps, but less haunting - is Jan

Ferreira, the celebrated “Jannie met die hoepel been.”

*Vat jou goed en trek, Ferreira
Vat jou goed en trek,
Jannie met die hoepel been,
Ferreira, Vat jou goed en trek.
Swaar dra, al aan die een kant,
O ja, al aan die een kant,
Vat jou goed en trek.*

There are two versions of Ferreira’s origin. Some say there was a Jan Ferreira (or Pereira) in Cape Town in the ’seventies of last century; and that the song arose from the shouts of the coloured urchins who followed and mimicked the unhappy man with bandy legs..

The other explanation comes from the country, where there dwelt (in 1872) a village belle named Ada van Aardt. Most persistent among her many suitors was the bandy-legged Jan Ferreira, a young farmer.

Unable to shake Jannie off, Ada decided to write a verse revealing her feelings. Her music mistress,

a Mrs. Maloney, was so impressed by the words that she sat down at the piano and composed the gay polka which so many dancers have enjoyed for nearly eighty years. But it must have been a cruel blow for poor “Jannie met die hoepel been.”

I read a news item not long ago about a school in the Uniondale district at which every one of the forty-two pupils had the same surname - Ferreira.

Ferreira is one of the few South African names of Portuguese origin. And the Ferreriras themselves have several different stories describing the arrival of the first member of the family. Theal says the progenitor was Ignatius Ferreira, a Portuguese boy who was saved from the wreck of the Chandos in Table Bay in 1722.

According to a more dramatic legend, the first of the line was Ignatius Leopold Ferreira, Commander of a Portuguese man-o’-war which was wrecked in False Bay in 1691. Most of the ship’s company took to the boats and were drowned. Ferreira and four others remained on board; and

when the sea went down a fisherman pulled out and saved them. The survivors are said to have been granted land at Fransch Hoek. Ferreira married Countess Almyne du Pre.

Another Portuguese name which is not so easily recognised is Delarey. The Bothas have been traced back to Piedmont; they were Italian Protestants. Scandinavia sent far more settlers to South Africa than most people imagine; almost as many as France. And some of the oldest families (like the Werdmullers) came from Switzerland.

The Archives, church records and the Deeds Office have been combed and combed again for the origins of South African families. This is the phase of history which seems to grip people more than any other; and so much has been uncovered and printed that there cannot be many old families with lost origins. Those family Bibles were not inscribed in vain.

Greatest of all these works is the “Geslacht-Register der Oude Kaapsche Familien.” The first compiler of this classic was Christoffel de

Villiers, a Cape Town journalist. Leaders of the Afrikaner community appealed for funds, but in 1887 de Villiers died. On his death-bed he asked Theal, the historian, to complete the task.

Financed by the Cape Government, Theal continued to trace the pedigrees, and the first three volumes came out in 1893. The second volume brought the names up to Z; but as a result of a discovery of further notes in the Archives, a third volume was published as a supplement. The set is now extremely rare. It is difficult to account for the disappearance of so many copies, but today it would be hard to locate more than a few dozen complete sets in the Union.

Old families at the Cape are those who arrived between the time of Van Riebeeck’s landing and 1795, the date of the First British Occupation. During that period about two thousand founders of existing families arrived. About nine hundred were German, about nine hundred came from Holland, and the rest were mainly French and Scandinavian.

English settlers at the Cape were first listed by Sir Bernard Burke in his "General and Heraldic Guide to the Colonial Gentry," published in 1891. Advocate H. E. Hockly's recent work on the 1820 Settlers provides the most complete list compiled up to the present.

Life in the platteland would be difficult without nicknames. It was pointed out in an Assembly debate on voters' rolls not long ago that there were eight Michiel Oliviers on one farm in the Humansdorp district. And twenty-two male De Wits living in the Prince Albert district were photographed in a group not long ago. Among the De Wit nicknames are Mossie, Klein Mossie, Bakker (the Prince Albert baker for twenty years), Snoek, Hardekop, Apie, Baard and Piet Bril. One of the De Wits is always known as Piet Orrel (organ); this is an inherited nickname which has been in the family for generations.

Prince Albert can also produce a Piet Skaap, the stock inspector, and Piet Witdonkie who rode a white donkey. Other nicknames are not so obvious. One man became known as "Negentien-

agt" because his favourite topic was the good old days of 1908. Then there is Piet Salon, who was a prisoner-of-war in Ceylon during the South African War.

In the Vredendal district there are about two hundred Van Zyls living within an area of five square miles. Sometimes a whole branch of a family receives a nickname - like the Spreeu van Zyls and the Duifie van Zyls of Piketberg. The Van Zyl families of Vredendal are known as the Belletjies, Tootjies, Rooi Gideons, Rooikatte, Knypies, Oostewinde en Ysterfonteiners.

Family reunions have been organised in recent years, and with astonishing results. Michael Anthonie Muller arrived at the Cape from Germany in 1735 and settled in the Swellendam district twelve years later. He soon became a leader; and one of his sons helped to found the Swellendam Republic and fought against the British in 1795 at the Battle of Muizenberg. Descendants still live on a continuous line of farms between Mossel Bay and Herbertsdale. In January, 1947, two centuries after Michael

Anthonie Muller arrived in the district, there was an enormous gathering of Mullers on the farm Kleinberg. Hundreds of Mullers from all parts of the Union attended the celebrations. They lived in tents, there were speeches and songs, the family history was read out and a family tree was completed. Similar reunions have been held by the Hofmeyrs in Cape Town and the De Villiers family in Paarl.

De Villiers is a name which dominates the directory in Paarl, and is seldom absent in the Cape villages. At Somerset West the Morkels once played a football match against the Theunissens, with other members of these two famous clans crowding along the touchlines. Stellenbosch is the ancestral home of the Hofmeyrs, Marais and Du Toits. The Cilliers and Russouws are more at home in Wellington; while the Dempers and Kriges are Caledon names, just as one speaks of the Hugos of Worcester.

It would be hard nowadays to discover the most common surname in South Africa, but I think Nel would come near the top of the list - with the

Fouries, Bothas, Van der Merwes and the Pretorius family not far behind.

The authority on meanings of Afrikaans names is Professor J. D. A. Krige, author of "Die Franse Familienname in Suid-Afrika" and other books dealing with names of Dutch and German origin. Malan, he finds, indicates "a heretic." Many names arose from the dwelling-places of the owners; for example, Marais meant one who lived near a morass, Du Preez in a forest and Dumont on a mountain.

Afrikaans versions of French names are often almost unrecognisable. Boshoff arrived at the Cape as Bouchard, Labuschagne was once La Bocage (a shrubbery), while Pienaar was Pinard, a slang name for wine. Gouws sounds like a good old Netherlands name; but it is derived from the French "Gaucher" (left-handed).

Courtship on horseback has not vanished from the platteland, and no doubt young men still find an excuse for visiting the girls of their choice by

pretending they are in search of missing horses. Anthony Trollope described the procedure as he saw it in his book "South Africa," published seventy years ago. He wrote:

"They are very great at making love, or 'freying' as they call it, and have their recognised forms for the operation. The young Boer who thinks that he wants a wife begins by riding round the country. On this occasion he does not trouble himself with the hard work of courtship, but merely sees what there is within the circle. He will have dressed himself with more than ordinary care, so that any impression he may make may be favourable, and it is probable that the young ladies in the district know what he is about. But when he has made his choice, then he puts on his very best, and cleans his saddle, and sticks a feather in his cap, and goes forth determined to carry his purpose."

Trollope might have added that the young man was able to estimate his chances of success by asking the girl for a glass of water. If she brought it out to him it was an ominous sign. But if he was invited inside, only two more ordeals awaited him.

One was the *opsit-kers*, the celebrated candle put out by the girl's mother to indicate how long the man might stay after the parents had gone to bed. She stuck a pin into the wax, knowing very well that an inch would burn for thirty minutes. Salt weakened the flame and was often used to delay the man's departure.

The second ordeal was the *ouers vra* ceremony, the formal request for permission to marry the girl. Men who had faced cornered leopards were often a little nervous when this moment arrived. However, the smart young man with the well-groomed horse had little to fear. And the appearance of the trippellaar played a large part in the whole affair. A man who could not look after a horse was obviously not to be trusted with the happiness of a daughter of the house.

Among recent revivals of old Cape customs is the wedding pageantry of the platteland. Horsemen escort the couple to church, they are greeted with volleys of rifle fire, and the service is followed by horsemanship contests.

The old-fashioned *bruilof* lasted longer. Long before the wedding the men painted up the *bruidswa*, a well-sprung wagonette, with gay designs suited to the occasion. They laid in ample stocks of sweet wine and brandy while the women baked the cakes and tarts. According to custom, only one special invitation was issued to the village fiddler. All the others knew they would be welcome.

A week or two before the wedding came the *gelukwens* ceremony, held on the farm of the bridegroom's parents. But the real feast took place at the home of the bride's parents, when the married couple arrived from the church. The *bruidswa* or smart Cape cart headed a long procession; and on arrival at the homestead the driver of the *bruidswa* reached the height of his skill by making the fancy curve known as a *Kaapse draai*. It took a fine driver to carry out that "figure eight" turn flawlessly at full gallop.

Paper flowers were often scattered at these weddings - a custom which came from France with the Huguenots. Not until the arrival of the

1820 Settlers was rice or confetti used. Bride and bridegroom sometimes sat beneath a wreath of flowers while the floor was littered with gold and silver paper.

Early last century, and long afterwards in some districts, a young man had to travel far to find a bride. They drove their wagons southwards, through flooded rivers and over rough and dangerous passes, to the old, settled areas of the Cape. When the romantic mission had been successfully completed the bride's parents often trekked into the hinterland to see what their daughter's new home looked like. According to custom, however, they always allowed the couple a fortnight's start before following in the tracks of the bridal wagon.

CHAPTER 13

SWARTLAND AND BEYOND

OVER THE ROLLING COUNTRY in front of my stoep I can see the Paardeberg hills from which Malmesbury draws its water. The roads running past my farm go deep into the Swartland, the old

name for the Malmesbury district, a name still used every day.

Malmesbury and its wheatlands do not lure the tourist, or even the Cape Town motorist, as do Paarl and Worcester and the towns among the trees and the mountains. Yet this Malmesbury district is my favourite and there are parts where I could 'draw a map of the farms from memory. Malmesbury has such contrasts within its boundaries. It has the farms of the lower Berg River in the north; farms that I saw from the deck of a sea-going yacht as I cruised up the river years ago. Up in that north-west corner you will find names like Duiker Eiland and Boebezaks Kraal, Patrysen Berg and Wilde Varkens Vallei. Go eastwards and you come to the farm Alles Verloren, where Dr. D. F. Malan was born; and three miles away the farm Boplaas, birthplace of General Smuts, both close to the villages of Riebeek West and Riebeek Kasteel.

Saldanha Bay and other bays, secluded and not so well known, come within this district. You

find names like Vledermuis Drift and Moorde-naars Bosch, Drosters Klip and Waterskilpad Kraal. And down near the coast are the farms which I came to know in one of the most satisfactory ways of all - by walking over them, twenty miles a day, with a shotgun ready. I suppose that is why I prefer the Malmesbury district; because it has given me such intimate memories of the veld.

Malmesbury veld ... the sharp smell of the winter soil after rain. Manitoka trees curled over by years and years of southeaster. The crash of a large duiker in the bush, the racing form as you raise your gun ... and then the bush closes noisily again and you do not regret the swift escape. Clusters of reeds, patches of *brand* where you will be lucky to find any buck exposing itself, tortoises in the grass, turtle-doves and owls. Then a green slope going down to a vlei; and a *berggans* coming up to look at the hunters and leading all the wild duck away. Silent glades, sandy farm tracks, and the pheasant flying out of little koppies. Guinea fowl diving noisily out of

the trees at dusk, the most difficult shot of all. And finally a glass of brandy at the farmhouse when you are so tired that you can only load the game into the back of the car and drive away towards the darkening shape of Table Mountain. I am no great hunter, and it was a memorable day when I brought down three steenbok. There were days when I missed everything - but I still had my twenty-mile walk.

Van Riebeeck's explorers first traversed this district on foot, carrying with them tobacco and beads as peace-offerings. They found larger buck than those of today, herds of zebras (shot out within living memory), rhinos tramping down the tall grass, and hippos in every river.

As far back as 1701 the people of the Cape were calling this district "Het Zwartland." Hunting licences were given to adventurous spirits "omme te mogen gaan schieten aan 't Zwarte land." But it was not the soil that gave the district its name, as some have said. It was the dark, notorious and aggressive shrub, the renosterbos. At one time it was believed that the renosterbos had come from

the East Indies as packing for empty wine casks. In fact, it has never been found outside South Africa; though it spread widely in the Cape because the old transport riders used it as dunnage when carrying brandy casks on their wagons.

Renosterbos is as typical of the Malmesbury district as wheat - and much older. It defies eradication. Veld burning only encourages it, as the seedlings come up in hundreds. Yet it is not without its uses. Everyone from the early explorers down to the hunting parties I accompanied found it made a magnificent blaze. Dry renosterbos burns at white heat and is gone almost in a flash. The farmers have a way of setting fire to a clump of moist renosterbos and collecting the dry remnants as a slow-burning charcoal. Kraals were made of renosterbos in the old days. The shrub also secretes large quantities of wax, but it has no commercial value. Early farmers in the district regarded the renosterbos as a punishment for their sins. Just a small shrub of a dark green colour that turns almost black in winter. The curse of the Swartland.

Malmesbury's first farmer was one Hendrik Muller (or Mulder) who secured a lease of sixty morgen in 1707 and trekked into the Swartland with his cattle.

By the middle of the eighteenth century a number of families had settled in the district, round the present town site and at Groene Kloof (now Mamre), at Riebeek Kasteel and Paardeberg. The first church had been built in 1745. Seven years later Hendrik Koster, a shoemaker, applied for ground at Doorn Kuil, on the outskirts of the village, "for the convenience of the Swartland people." It was granted on condition that he did not "sow or plough or keep breeding cattle, but only builds a house on it and keeps about three horses."

Thunberg the botanist visited the Swartland in 1773 and remarked: "Ever since the death of the vicar three years ago the church has been vacant, no one having come from Holland to succeed him. A service is held once a month by clergymen from the town. Some farmers have to travel two days to church."

As early as 1805 an enterprising medical man, Dr. Hassner, was granted rights over the warm, radio-active sulphur spring. These waters possess the properties that made Aachen in Germany famous as a spa. They come up at ninety-one degrees Fahrenheit, and sufferers from rheumatism, gout and chronic catarrh have found relief there. Dr. Hassner soon vanished from the scene. Since then many schemes have been drawn up for developing Malmesbury Spa, and one day, no doubt, there will be a sanatorium near the healing waters.

Sir Lowry Cole, Governor of the Cape, visited the village in 1829 and showed his pleasure by proclaiming the spot Malmesbury in honour of his wife's father, the first Earl of Malmesbury. Bishop Grey, nearly twenty years later, noted that the mineral baths did not seem much used. He found few English residents, "except at Saldanha and St. Helena Bay, where they do not enjoy a very respectable character."

A later traveller, Archbishop William West Jones, formed a more favourable impression. He

left Durbanville early one morning in 1875 and reached Mr. Eaton's farm Drooge Vlei that afternoon. "It is really a wonderful place," he wrote, "a complete village in itself, containing 140 souls, and is entirely his own property. He has large carpenter's, blacksmith's, painter's, brick making and miller's works; keeps butcher's, baker's, grocer's, shoemaker's and haberdasher's shops; and employs the whole population. His farm, too, is very extensive. He is a thorough Churchman and Christian gentleman. He has built a School-Chapel, in which he himself conducts two services each Sunday, one in English and one in Dutch."

Malmesbury had its own volunteer cavalry regiment in 1856. An agricultural society was formed two years later and the first fair was held. During the winter of 1862 continuous rain (and faulty building) caused the complete collapse of nine houses and the Dutch Reformed Church. Today about six thousand people live in the town, while there are forty-thousand people in the district. A friend of mine who once edited the

newspaper there, the "Swartlander," told me that Malmesbury prided itself on being the healthiest town in the Cape. He quoted, merely as one of many examples, the activities of Mr. Andries Bester, who celebrated his ninety-fifth birthday in 1946 by going out shooting for seven hours on horseback. Some years ago the official death-rate figures were so low that the Department of Public Health thought a mistake had been made. An official paid a special visit to Malmesbury and returned both satisfied and astounded.

If you had gone into the Swartland at harvest time in the wagon days you would have seen teams of skilful coloured men reaping with scythes and sickles. It must have been a delightful and rhythmical spectacle. The self-binder and the mowing machines put an end to it.

They reaped the wheat cleanly, each man cutting a swathe of six feet, thirty strokes to the minute, moving forward a hundred yards at a time without a rest. Farmers gave prizes of boer

tobacco to the fastest cutters. When the last wagon-load of wheat was packed the horses were decorated with ribbons, a fiddler played the wheat to the stack, and that night there was dancing and wine for all.

“Plaas Japie” of the Malmesbury wheat belt is a character you can tell at a glance, the product of generations of labourers who have worked on the same farms and grown wise in the ways of the district. I like to see him and his friends stepping it out along the roads on holidays; feathers in their old felt hats; guitars twanging; dusty troubadours on their way to the dorp with a cheerful greeting for everybody.

These old *volkies* think nothing of starting out at four on a winter morning to reach the lands and their ploughs at daybreak. They work until sundown and still have the energy to play their guitars and sing. They know the grain in the root, stubble and stack. Only at harvesting time on most farms nowadays do they expect a wine ration to sustain them. It is sad to think that many have left the Swartland for city factories,

and that natives are taking their places. They must miss the waving grain and the salt ocean breezes that mingle with the scent of the heather ... the sea of wheat rustling under the sun. And the farmers must miss them, for a native understands only cattle and mealies, and he does not belong to the Swartland tradition like old “Plaas Japie.”

Cannons on many hill-tops in the Swartland used to roar their signals in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Some of them are still there beside the beacons of modern surveyors.

If a fleet came into Table Bay a gun was fired at the fort, the signal was taken up by men tending the cannon on Tygerberg, Paarl Mountain, Simonsberg, Riebeek Kasteel and at other spots where the little colonies of farmers grew wheat and vegetables and raised cattle to supply the ships voyaging to and fro from India.

One of the furthest outposts in the late seventeenth century was Riebeek Kasteel, a little

colony below the *kasteel* or castlelike mountain. When the farmers heard this signal, they yoked their ox wagons and trekked with supplies to Table Bay. The Hottentots of the district owned fine cattle, which were bartered for such coveted goods as arrack, beads and tobacco.

The old cannon on the summit of Riebeek Kasteel was brought down and placed in the square beneath two pine trees near the post office in 1934. This cannon had in its day told not only the good news of the arrival of ships with simple luxuries from Europe for colonial farmers; it had also barked its warning when Hottentots rose and descended upon the farmers to pillage and to kill. Burghers and militia would saddle up and ride to help the threatened men.

Sometimes the response to the cannon's call came too late, as the name of a farm in this district recalls. The natives descended on Gerrit Cloete in 1701. Before help arrived his cattle were driven off, his store ransacked and his home burned. After the natives had been punished Cloete came back to his desolate farm

and rechristened it "Alles Verloren" (Everything is Lost). That, as I have said, is the farm where Dr. D. F. Malan was born.

Another farm bears the name De la Fontaine's Gift. It was given to a farmer who made peace with the Hottentots; and in the deed of gift it was laid down that no taxation should be levied on the farm. And the farm remains free from land taxes to this day.

Perhaps you do not know Riebeek Kasteel? It lies away from the main roads, more remote and less known than many other historic villages further from Cape Town. Yet half an hour's easy motoring from Malmesbury, along good roads and over Botman's Kloof, brings you to the place.

There are two pleasant spots for picnics - one at the foot of the kloof in a grove of poplars; and another at Groene Rivier, just beyond Riebeek West. Bathing and fishing are good in the deep pools of the Berg River five miles from Riebeek Kasteel. Here is Sonqua's Drift, crossed by the

second exploring party bound for Namaqualand under Corporal Pieter Cruythoff. The bold corporal climbed Riebeek Kasteel in February, 1661, and named it after his commander at the fort. Sonqua's Drift still appears on the modern maps, too, and it seems strange to find the farm of that name on the telephone.

So when you linger by the Berg River at this spot, you may picture the rough, fearless soldiers of the Company resting in the shadows of the same mountain. Van Meerhoff, a true adventurer of his time, and journalist of the expedition, wrote of the place: "Here we remain resting by a pretty rivulet on the mountain side; the neighbourhood abounds in all kinds of game - to wit, lions, rhinoceroses, zebras, ostriches and hartebeests - by reason of the fact that there is always good grazing and sweet water. Round about the mountain is reasonably good farming land, in the opinion of Pieter Cruythoff."

Cruythoff was right. Today Riebeek Kasteel is one of the wine-growing districts which is not ashamed to print its name on the bottle labels.

Grain, sheep and fruit flourish,. and at one farm I saw long rows of yellow tobacco leaves drying in the sun.

But the big game of which Van Meerhoff wrote you will seek in vain. A few buck remain, jealously guarded, and there are wild duck to be shot on the river and at Vogel Vlei. Only in the names of farms are the great creatures of the veld still to be seen - farms called after elephant, eland, zeebok, rhino and rietbok in combination with vlei, fontein, kop and kloof.

Three miles from Riebeek Kasteel is Riebeek West; and years ago there was a little feud between the two villages which has probably not died out at the present time. It started, I was told, in the days when there was one church at Riebeek West for the people of both villages. Three miles, in those days, meant much more than a swift motor run. The farmers of Riebeek Kasteel suggested that a church should be placed midway between the two congregations. When the idea was rejected a Riebeek Kasteel farmer gave a portion of his land to the community, and

a noble church was built. But the feud did not end there. Every time the question of a new school or police station or railway siding arose, the rivalry between the two villages broke out afresh. The people of the two villages, they tell you, are different, each with their own local patriotism. They do not visit each other as much as do the people in other neighbouring villages. Children grow up in one village without meeting the children only three miles away.

It is some time since I visited these villages, but when I was there I met one old woman who had never seen a train at close quarters. "I have watched the smoke of that thing far away, but I will never ride in it," she declared firmly.

Beyond the Swartland juts up Piketberg mountain with the town on its slopes. Piketberg dominates the Sandveld, that little-known but charming sweep of country where gates shut out all but the most determined visiting motorists.

There was once a signal cannon on Piketberg mountain bearing the date 1716. Long before

that date, when Goske was at war with the Hottentots, there were Dutch military pickets on the mountain. The card game called picquet has nothing to do with it; but only in recent years has the proper spelling of Piketberg been restored.

Piketberg was very much in the wilds when it was founded in 1840, the year when the Rev. J. W. C. Scholtz settled there. Farms in the Sandveld were distant outposts for long afterwards. A report on the district which I have, written in 1875, is disparaging but not hopeless. "There is a large portion still uncultivated," said a government official, "and in parts of the flats and Zandveld the occupiers are a poor and ignorant class, as backward as any who are to be found in the extreme border districts. From the want of roads they have been to a great degree isolated from their neighbours, and are not yet much affected by the spirit of enterprise and industry which elsewhere prevails; but here and there intelligent proprietors are settling amongst them, whose energetic example will no doubt soon have an educating influence."

At about that time, when Piketberg was mentioned in the Cape Legislative Assembly, a member claimed that a magistrate had been sent there, but had returned to Cape Town and stated that he had been unable to find the place.

That was also the period when the Anabaptists, a religious sect, caused a stir in the district by warning the farmers that a Destroying Angel was on the way to this sinful world. They were prosecuted and fined at Piketberg for planting watermelons and pruning vines on Sunday.

In May, 1880, the old cannon was brought down from the mountain to fire a salute in honour of the Queen's Birthday. They fired it again when the telegraph line was opened to Cape Town, and on other important occasions. All went well until a holiday in 1905, when an amateur gunner decided to give a louder salute than usual. He put in a large charge of gunpowder, rammed a wet sack into the muzzle and primed the touch hole. The boom of the historic gun rocked the village. Every window in the schoolhouse was shattered. Meanwhile the sack had been expelled from the

gun like a projectile and had gone roaring into a plantation of bluegum trees, which caught alight.

On the farm Schrik-van-Rondom in the Piketberg district there is a hill called Goudkop. They sank two shafts there, one very deep, in 1886; but little gold was found. Another attempt was made nine years later, this time by tunnelling at the base of the hill. The prospectors gave up, and nothing has been done since then. Nevertheless, it is interesting to hear that when Pieter van Jaarsveld was using his "X-ray eyes" in the district not long ago he reported "seeing" two gold reefs. If ever the Cape landscape is defaced by mine dumps, Piketberg may be regarded as a likely area. Piketberg is welcome to that sort of prosperity. I prefer the old spectacle of the grain fields in the spring.

Piketberg mountain is famous for Versfeld's Pass, built by the pioneer J. P. Versveld in the 'seventies of last century. The fact that there was rich soil on the plateau had been known ever since a Huguenot named Mouton had settled there. Mouton followed a watercourse, found a

vlei, built a cottage there and planted an oak avenue, pears and oranges. I do not know what happened to Mouton; but after he died the plateau remained uninhabited until 1866, when Versfeld bought the land known as Mouton's Vlei.

Versfeld was one of those independent spirits who do not care to wait for the government to build roads for them. Nevertheless; the mountain was so steep that it was difficult to plan even a wagon-track. Versfeld was fiddling with his watch-chain on the table one day when it fell in loops. That was the source of his inspiration. "Ek het my pad," he shouted.

He built three loops in the zigzag road during the ascent of 1,500 feet, so that the force of gravity would carry a wagon round each curve and the driver would find himself in position for a straight pull-out. That highly original plan saved two thirds of the cost and two-thirds of the time. In fact, the whole pass, more than three miles long, cost only £200 and was finished by Versfeld's own labourers within three months.

The old pass emerges on the summit almost directly above the starting point on the plain.

I first saw the plateau farms from the air, on that memorable October day in 1940 when I was returning from the spectacle of the total eclipse. No longer isolated, the plateau is still vastly different from the farms of the valley and the Sandveld. The high farms cover ten thousand morgen. They have a different climate up there, and different crops - bananas and buchu, magnificent oranges everything flourishing with the aid of a high rainfall, cold winters and cool summers.

Zebrakop (4,776 feet) is the highest peak of the Piketberg range. This is a simple climb; but not far away is the Toring, or Hercules Tower, a rock pinnacle which was regarded for many years as unclimbable. However, four experienced mountaineers led by A. B. Berrisford tackled it in 1933, and in spite of five hundred feet of strenuous rockwork they had reached the summit within an hour. Another virgin peak had

been conquered. All the Swartland and the Sandveld stretched out below the Tower.

If you are not afraid of gates I can recommend a run through the heart of the Sandveld in the spring. I drove south from Lambert Bay one September afternoon, through wheat growing almost down to the coast, along a road that was built during the war.

The route to Cape Town took me through quiet places, Sandberg, Faleisheuvel, Het Kruis; there was hardly a signpost, but there were many shallow drifts.

I remember the run because it took me back to the beginning of the century. The family groups on the stoeps, the *kappies* and flowing dresses of the women; the whole scene spoke of a countryside undisturbed by objectionable forms of progress. When you are tired of national roads, I advise you to venture into the byways of the Sandveld.

CHAPTER 14 PAINTERS OF THE LAND

UNTIL THE END OF LAST CENTURY the intelligent traveller either preserved a memorable scene in his sketch-book or lost it for ever. I have been exploring the little-known world of eighteenth and nineteenth-century art at the Cape - those pictures, restful and exciting, which aid the historian and give such romantic impressions of the new country.

Thomas Baines and T. W. Bowler were the famous last-century artists. But there were others. Hundreds of pictures are treasured by private collectors; pictures which have seldom or never been exhibited or reproduced; pictures giving vivid glimpses of life at the Cape far beyond living memory.

Artists tell me that the early colonists, in the struggle for survival, seldom learnt to paint. They left it to visitors and the wives of visitors. Hunters, explorers, botanists, soldiers, one admiral, missionaries recorded the pioneer days.

Gifted ladies of leisure such as Lady Anne Barnard helped to reflect vanished and fascinating scenes.

Probably the finest collection of historic Africana paintings in the world is owned by Mr. William Fehr of Kenilworth, Cape Town. His antique furniture, china and copper is most impressive; and on the walls, between the gleaming cabinets and cupboards, hangs the pick of the original drawings and paintings. Mr. Fehr has hundreds more in oak chests and kists bearing the V.O.C. monogram.

One of the earliest paintings in this collection is a Table Bay scene in oils by George Lambert and Samuel Scott, dated 1720. These eighteenth century artists painted Table Mountain in fantastic shapes; someone started this grotesque fashion and all the others followed. I believe the explanation is that the artists have never seen the mountain, but relied on rough sketches given to them by seamen who had called at Table Bay. An alluring miniature oil on copper by Francis Swaine (1748) gives an accurate idea of the ships

in Table Bay, but reveals Lion's Head and Devil's Peak as steep pinnacles with a small Table Mountain between them. Swaine was the first English marine painter of note. He never visited the Cape.

Samuel Davis, a director of the British East India Company, painted the Cape Town waterfront about 1790 and showed all the buildings from the Castle to the upper end of Strand Street. Davis, like many other educated men and women of the period, had learnt to sketch for his own amusement. There is nothing amateurish about his use of water-colours. He illustrated a book on St. Helena, but all his Cape paintings are in private collections.

Among the early professional artists at the Cape were Samuel and William Daniell. William was a Royal Academician. In 1804 Samuel Daniell published books of colour plates entitled "African Scenery and Animals." One of the originals owned by Mr. Fehr, called "Boers Returning from Hunting" is a realistic document

from the past. William Daniell was a marine painter, one of the most powerful of his day.

Mr. Fehr has a mysterious little oil showing a woman in a mountain stream. On the back is written: "Capel Sluyt, Table Mountain - My own bathing place." The handwriting is clearly that of Lady Anne Barnard. Samuel Daniell stayed with the Barnards, so that he may have been the artist; but no other oils have been traced to Samuel Daniell while he was at the Cape.

Vice Admiral Sir Jahleen Brenton spent the years 1815 to 1821 as Admiralty Commissioner at Simonstown. This observant naval officer journeyed to Knysna and left a valuable and little-known series of drawings and water-colours, an important record of the places he visited. One is a Genadendal church interior, sketched during a service. He also painted a False Bay panorama, fourteen feet in length, from Cape Point to Hangklip. These old panoramas often reveal a baffling perspective. When viewed in circular form, however, with the ends joined, the artist's intentions become clear.

Sir Charles D'Oyly, an Indian civil servant, depicted Cape scenes in 1833 with professional skill and a touch of humour. One of his Cape Town pictures of a street brawl shows that there were typical "skollies" in those days. Some of his work is to be seen in the Cape Archives.

A soldier-surveyor who painted the Cape countryside faithfully was Lieut.-Colonel C. C. Michell. He built the Green Point lighthouse, Sir Lowry's Pass, Michell Pass near Ceres and the Montagu Pass between George and Oudtshoorn. Another soldier-artist, Sir Harry Darell, left a spirited record of the Kaffir War of 1846. He hunted at the Cape and did some good drawings of horses and foxhounds.

The paintings of Baines and Bowler dominate the middle of last century, but a lesser-known yet capable artist of that period was Wilhelm Langschmidt. I came upon a stirring example of his work in a suburban home not long ago - a roistering canvas of a country dance, with red-coated soldiers leaning against the wine barrels.

It is one of those paintings in which a horde of expressive faces demand closer study.

Langschmidt came from Grahbouw in Germany; hence the Grabouw in the Cape, where Langschmidt settled as a farmer and portrait painter. His most widely-known picture is of Long-street, with Malays, water-carriers, hawkers, and Langschmidt himself sitting on a stoep wearing a top-hat. Langschmidt's descendants in Caledon have other pictures which are unknown to the general public.

The great Baines was an adventurous spirit. His paintings have been summed up as "pioneer work well done." Son of a sailor, he revelled in full-rigged ships and storm scenes; and not long after his arrival in Cape Town he advertised himself as a "Marine and Portrait Painter." Yet when he travelled inland to the Kaffir Wars, and still deeper into unknown South West Africa, he told the wild story in effective pictures.

One of his friends described Baines as "a man to whom the wilderness brought gladness and the

mountains peace." I have seen a series of twelve originals by Baines dealing with a Table Mountain climb, with such incidents as killing a snake, chasing a leopard and preparing a meal. Some painters have kept posterity guessing, but Baines had a neat habit of writing details and dates on the back of almost every canvas.

Bowler, self-taught and with a keen news sense, made his first pencil-sketch at the Cape almost on the day in 1834 when he joined the astronomers' staff at the Royal Observatory. This shows the building and is one of Mr. Fehr's twenty-two Bowler originals. Bowler never painted two identical pictures. He was an eager pictorial reporter, and he never cared to miss a shipwreck, the opening of a new building or the arrival of a new steamer. I found the early work of Bowler's pupils interesting. One or two of them aped Bowler's style so cleverly that it is not always easy to distinguish between master and pupil.

Lady Anne Barnard was far more entertaining as a writer than as a painter. Nevertheless, her

pictures deserve the place they have found in the Castle. At the same period Lady Hamilton was living at Witteboom, Constantia; and her drawings of Groot Constantia, Groote Schuur and various landscapes are in private collections.

Later came Lady Eyre, a fine water-colourist who painted an ambitious panorama of the whole Cape Town foreshore from the Castle jetty. One seldom hears of Georgina Eyre's work, but she painted many charming Cape scenes while her husband was away at the Kaffir Wars in the middle of last century.

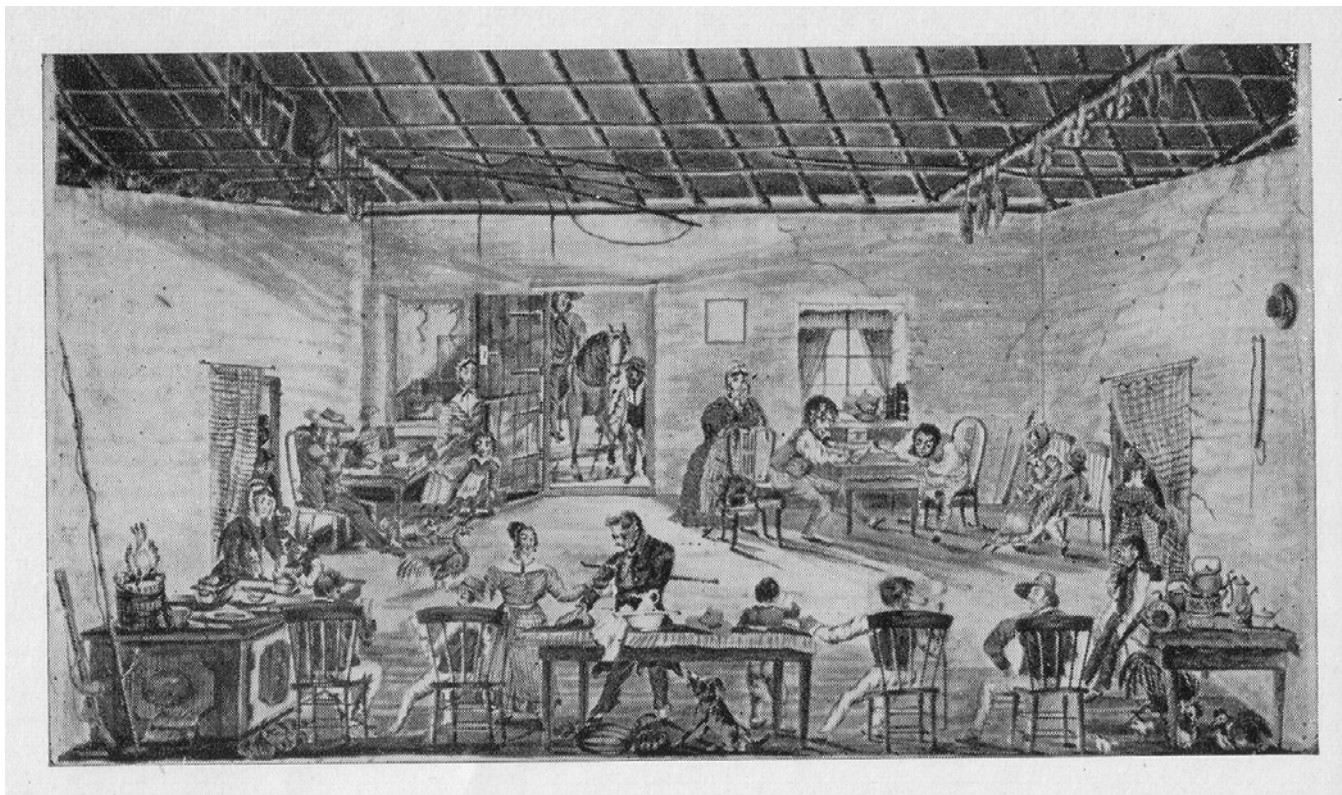
Last of the women artists of last century was Mrs. Alys Fane Trotter, author of "Old Colonial Houses of the Cape" and "Old Cape Colony." She arrived with her husband, a government engineer, in 1896; and soon she was cycling from farm to farm doing her delightful line drawings of homesteads and gables.

Mrs. Trotter was the first writer and artist to make people realise the spell and the beauty of the historic Cape architecture. Many have

followed in her tracks by motor-car; but I have still to see more captivating sketches than those made by Mrs. Trotter on her long, hot bicycle journeys. It is pleasant to add that Mrs. Trotter is still alive and active in England at the age of eighty-six. Mr. Fehr has all the original sketches from her two books - a prize indeed and the pride of his great collection.

The camera was already replacing the sketch-book while Mrs. Trotter was at work. The great era of Africana pictures closed at the end of last century, to be followed by the dawn of South African art.

You will find genius cheek by jowl with mediocrity in the South African National Art Gallery in Cape Town - as many art critics will gladly tell you. But when I stare into the beauty of those pictures I find myself thinking of the artists. No wonder so many novels have been based on the lives of painters.



Poortermans, a visiting artist, drew this interior of Mr. Laubscher's farmhouse at Saldanha Bay in 1848.

Starved for years, the gallery is able to exhibit only here and there the finest and most typical work of the famous. Yet there is enough to start the imagination working. I always come away with the desire to know more about the men behind the pictures; the human struggle is more exciting than any painted scene upon the walls.

Art in South Africa, I gather, began with Pieter Wenning. It is strange to reflect that the period when the Dutch East India Company was pouring all sorts of men into the Cape was also the period of Rembrandt and the Dutch masters; yet not one of them ventured south with his paints.

Last century, as I have said, men like Baines and Bowler and Langschmidt were turning out admirable Africana pieces. But when Cape Town organised its first art show in 1851 (visited by 3,000 people), nearly all the pictures had to be imported. Up to the end of last century a South African canvas was rarely seen in any home.

Frans Oerder, who worked in Pretoria early this century, was among the pioneers. He was steeped in the Netherlands tradition, as you will see if you study his picture of kitchen utensils and a copper pot in the gallery. Anton van Wouw, the sculptor, Hugo Naude (the first South African to study abroad), and J. E. A. Volschenk of Riversdale were also pioneers. Naude was an exquisite painter of the spring flowers in Namaqualand, but no typical example is to be found in the gallery.

These men were more than competent artists, and in recent years up to a thousand guineas have been paid for their paintings. But they left no lasting influence. Wenning did. He was a melancholy, bearded Hollander who served in a Pretoria bookshop at £20 a month, doing etchings and a few paintings in his spare time.

D. C. Boonzaaier, the Cape Town cartoonist, discovered the genius of Wenning during a visit to Pretoria in 1914. He saw a small painting in the bookshop window and returned later having made up his mind to buy it.

“Oh, that!” said Wenning.” A woman came in and admired it, and as she was poor I gave it to her.”

That was Wenning. Only a few connoisseurs appreciated his work during his lifetime, and he never received a high price for any painting. Boonzaaier persuaded him to spend three months on leave in the Cape, however, and six people each subscribed £10 so that Wenning would not suffer from the loss of his bookshop salary.

Mr. Bernard Lewis, until recently a national gallery trustee, told me that during the visit Wenning sold him a small painting of a Claremont cottage for three guineas. It was sold for the fourth time not long ago for £300.

Five pictures by Wenning, at low prices, were placed in an Adderley Street window. They remained there for a fortnight, but not one was sold. Wenning was never a “people’s painter.” He chose unusual angles, preferred the back of a house to the front; and achieved mellow effects with great emotional appeal to the discerning

patron. His colours were rich and his work vigorous.

Wenning was delighted with the Cape, and as a result of Boonzaaier’s encouragement he became a full-time professional artist. One spring day Wenning and Gwelo Goodman were walking down Newlands Avenue together when both artists stopped abruptly to gaze at the sunlight on the white walls of the cottages.

“A typical Goodman scene,” remarked Goodman.” I’ll paint that.”

Wenning bit his lip, for he had intended to paint the scene himself. As it was, he left it to Goodman.

Entirely self-taught, Wenning studied European reproductions and Japanese prints. He died in 1921, leaving only a modest output of oils for future collectors to prize.

The Wenning boom, however, did not open until 1945, and then it became the most sensational boom in South African art history. Auctioneers in Johannesburg were largely responsible for it.

Since then Wenning has been imitated; probably the only South African artist whose style has been copied. An art dealer who sold two large “Wennings” in good faith refunded the money when Bernard Lewis and Gregoire Boonzaaier identified them as fakes.

Gregoire Boonzaaier studied under Wenning and many of his earlier pictures reveal the influence. Wenning’s finest works are in private collections; the national gallery has a few of his lesser efforts. Among them is a painting of the Old Treaty House at Woodstock.

One man whose water-colours hang in the gallery was only discovered as an artist after his death. He was H. W. Hermann, a photographer who had a studio in Stal Plein. One of his daughters met Bernard Lewis in the street and asked him whether he would like to see a set of pictures her late father had painted.

To his surprise, Lewis found that the photographer had done a charming series of scenes in Cape Town last century - old Rogge

Bay with its wooden jetty, Clifton, Kalk Bay and Table Bay from Zonnebloem. Hermann had painted with distinction, but in secret; and he had never sold a picture. His daughters presented these fine pictures to the gallery.

Gwelo Goodman was one of the South African artists who were rewarded during their lifetime. His magnificent Tulbagh church faces you as you enter the gallery; typical of a painter who specialised in Cape Dutch architecture. An unlikely subject, the City Hall in Cape Town, became memorable when he painted it looking down on the parade stalls, with the mountain behind. “Hot and violet in colour,” was one leading critic’s view of this scene; but I think the subject demanded that treatment.

A friend once found Goodman painting Table Mountain from memory in his drawing-room. Only the rich could afford his romantic pictures. Before he gained international recognition as a painter, Goodman was a railway employee in Rhodesia - hence the Gwelo.

Hendrik Pierneef, a genial and significant figure in the South African art world of many years, had to work as assistant to a tobacconist at one stage of his career. Then he spent eight years as librarian. But all the time he was developing the technique which finally brought him to the front rank of landscape painters. He is also a superb wood-engraver.,

One of South Africa's leading portrait painters, Robert Broadley, was a successful professional golfer before he decided to devote his whole time to art. J. H. Amshewitz, the mural painter who died a few years ago, also made a dramatic change of occupation. He was a stage comedian (Perlmutter in "Potash and Perlmutter") when he decided to settle in South Africa and paint. And there was a landscape and seascape painter named Thomas Meacham who was once a brewer in Cape Town.

Malays, with faces so full of character, have inspired some of the finest portraits by Neville Lewis. In the gallery, however, the Lewis portrait of a native smoking a pipe is the one

praised by critics. The most impressive Malay in the gallery they say, is James Eddie's round-faced study.

General Smuts once said there was something mystic and magical about South Africa, something almost eerie, that influenced artists. Certain critics from overseas have described the strong sunlight as a snare, leading to blatancy. No doubt the masterpieces of the gallery are those by Tonks, Van Goyen, Ribot and other world-famous names. I am no critic, and so I find myself drawn to the scenes that I know; and, given a choice, it would be Wenning.

Behind many of the finest gifts in this gallery stands the frail figure of Mr. Alfred A. de Pass of Rondebosch. I visited him on his eighty-seventh birthday in July, 1948; and he told me of the trade that enabled him to present works of art worth hundreds of thousands of pounds to galleries and museums.

It was the guano trade. His father worked the islands off the coast of South-West Africa; and

young Alfred de Pass met the schooners at Rotterdam and analysed the cargoes. "A stinking trade - but profitable," he summed up.

I came away with a painting from the de Pass collection, almost unique.

This "fairy godfather" of art became an artist himself a few years ago. Now and again he paints flowers and grapes in watercolours. By now you will have realised that I am no connoisseur; a queer guide indeed to the beauty of the South African National Art Gallery. But I have a picture by Alfred de Pass.

CHAPTER 15

THEY PRESERVE THE PAST

ANTIQUÉ DEALERS HAVE TOLD ME that only a fraction of the old furniture and other treasures in the homesteads of the Cape has reached the salerooms. In spite of fabulous prices, most families treat their heirlooms with respect.

The export of antiques has been stopped. Some years ago a London firm of art dealers sent a man all the way to Stellenbosch to attend a sale

and buy up the valuable furniture, especially chairs. If he had not punctured a tyre on the way, many fine items would have left the country.

Cape furniture was not always beautiful. Many seventeenth century specimens were ugly; they came from ships or were copied from cabin furniture. It was only after the arrival of the Huguenots that baroque masterpieces were shaped from stinkwood and yellowwood. They found their timber on the Rivier Zondereinde mountains near Genadendal, and shipped it by sea from the Breede River mouth. Knysna came into the picture later.

Stinkwood deserves the great reputation it has gained in fairly recent years. Until late last century it was still being sold as firewood; today even the roots are converted into egg-cups and polished bowls. This laurel-wood of the Cape appeals to craftsmen not only on account of the fine grain, but also because of the wonderful patina brought about by clever oiling and polishing. It is a difficult timber to work, but the results justify the most tender care.

You have to stand in a sawmill to smell the powerful stinkwood odour. Fetid when freshly cut, the smell soon becomes merely aromatic and finally vanishes. (Tambuti, on the other hand, retains a fragrant odour. This tree of the Transvaal is stinkwood's most dangerous rival. Many connoisseurs say that tambuti makes finer furniture than any other timber). White stinkwood, or Camdeboo stinkwood, also has an offensive odour; otherwise the white and black stinkwood have nothing in common.

Woodcutters were once able to buy stinkwood at three shillings a tree. The record price in 1948 was £1,500; and as much as £6 2s. a cubic foot in the log has been paid since then. Although the government forests are closed, fallen trees and private estates keep the furniture makers going. The demand is so keen that a century old wagon, no longer roadworthy, was sold for £100 not long ago - because it was made of stinkwood. Old bridges, too, have yielded valuable baulks of stinkwood; even railway sleepers have been transformed into claw-and-ball tables.

Antique stinkwood and other Cape furniture often reveals a happy blending of the Dutch idea of simplicity and comfort with French elegance. Wardrobes were spacious; kists were heavy and austere and stood flat on the floor; the old craftsmen loved symmetry, and only the small tables, as a rule, were imaginative. The impressive four-poster beds made at the Cape might almost all have been shaped to the same pattern, with their fluted legs and ornamental head-pieces. They were certainly not made to be moved.

Armoires, some of the kists and corner cupboards reveal Flemish inspiration. Oriental touches are not lacking in certain tables and chairs. The size of much Cape furniture was due to the fact that enormous, high rooms had to be filled; and such pieces look incongruous in small modern homes.

Probably the finest period in Cape furniture was the second half of the eighteenth century. Those were the years when the Cape first became really prosperous after a century of struggle; when better houses were built, and much grand furniture came

from France to fill the rooms; when local craftsmen felt the influence of all this French culture. For three years there was a French garrison at the Castle, and Cape Town was called “Little Paris.” Thibault the architect was at work, and Anton Anreith the sculptor and wood-carver. These men, at least, left a rich legacy of refinement. Slave carpenters were copyists, but they had sound examples to copy.

Many of the old Cape tables and chairs were local versions of the work of Chippendale, Sheraton and the English masters. I believe that even the homely, straight-backed *riempie*, so typical of the Cape farmhouse, may be traced back to the Stuart chair.

Stories of bargains made in remote farmhouses are rarely heard today. In the first place you must possess an eye for timber to discover a treasure in some dusty and blackened relic. And then you have still to persuade the owner to part with it.

Every year more than 17,000 people enter the early eighteenth century house in Strand Street,

Cape Town - the stately house with the Thibault facade, the fanlight and the nine windows facing the sea.

To nearly all these visitors, Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet is a legendary figure. They see the fine old furniture, but not the woman. Yet for nearly 70 years this house was the home of a strong and gracious personality who was once called the “uncrowned queen of South Africa.” There are still some, of course, who remember Maria Margaretha de Wet. And all who know old Cape Town must be aware of her presence as they move from room to room and admire her exquisite possessions.

It is clear that the house was built in 1701, probably by a sea captain who brought some of the material with him on his last voyage from the East. Those old Hollanders seem to have had their doubts about Cape Town’s summer climate. The small bricks and red tiles came all the way from Batavia, and were used to create a cool atmosphere.

This property at 35 Strand Street (known as “the Strand” in those days because it was the waterfront street) must have been much larger in the early eighteenth-century. Stables and coach house have vanished, though the entrance is still to be seen in the courtyard. Old paintings suggest that there was once a garden beyond the slave quarters.

Fortunately the complete house remains, a typical early, well-to-do Cape Town home - the only surviving example that is fully and richly furnished in the style of the period. It is a home rather than a museum. Though many valuable antiques have been added, every room holds its memories of Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet.

The de Wet family arrived at the Cape only 39 years after Van Riebeeck; but it was not until 1809 that Mrs. de Wet, a widow, bought the house in Strand Street. It became the home of one of her sons, Dr. Johannes de Wet, first President of the Cape Legislative Council, barrister and art collector. His wife was a Miss

Adriana Horak, and they had two daughters, Maria Margaretha and Margaretha Jacoba.

Soon after the Crimean War ended a young officer of the British-German Legion landed in Cape Town with a letter of introduction to Dr. de Wet. He was Johan Koopmans of Amsterdam; and in 1864 he married Maria Margaretha.

For a few years they lived in Wale Street, in a house that has vanished. Koopmans lost his job, and the young couple returned to the de Wet family in Strand Street. Not long afterwards Koopmans was appointed Sergeant-at-Arms in the old Cape House; but he and his wife remained with the de Wets. Koopmans died after sixteen years of happy married life. It was then that Maria decided to call herself Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet.

Strand Street was once known as the “street of the koopmans” (the merchants), who lived there because they were close to the shipping; but that was merely a coincidence.

After the death of Dr. de Wet the two sisters kept house together. Margaretha Jacoba, who lived until 1911, was a kindly, retiring woman. Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet, in the last two decades of last century, became famous for her “salon” and her grand manner.

Governors, generals, politicians, distinguished visitors all called on Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet. A coloured page opened the carriage doors and brought the visiting cards to the hospitable, black-clothed old lady. Cecil Rhodes was there again and again, sounding her and listening to her views. “She is a dangerous woman, and I am more afraid of her than of the whole Afrikaner Bond,” remarked Rhodes, probably more than half in earnest.

Undoubtedly the influence of Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet was deep and far-reaching, and she had many interests. Proposals to demolish parts of the Castle to make way for railways and tramways infuriated her. Rhodes sent his secretary to discuss the problem with her and

emphasize that only a small projecting buttress would have to be removed.

“Tell Mr. Rhodes that his nose is only a little point on his face,” retorted Mrs. Koopmans-de Wt. “Let him cut it off and look in the glass.”

Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet saved the Castle; and her vigorous letters to the newspapers prevented the authorities from building a new Supreme Court in the garden of Government House. She was also a champion of the Dutch language.

Before the South African War many thousands of women in the Cape Colony signed the peace petition drawn up by Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet. During the war she protested against sending Boer prisoners to St. Helena. The historic home in Strand Street was searched. It had become a store-house, filled with comforts for the people in the camps.

She had a comfortable income which enabled her to add much blue porcelain to the “Blue Room” and many fine pieces of furniture. But old stinkwood and olyvenhout, rosewood and

satinwood went at bargain prices in those days. Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet was not fabulously wealthy. During a city property boom last century she was offered £15,000 for the house. Though the price was high, she refused to consider leaving her home.

Young people often gathered at 35 Strand Street for musical evenings. Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet had studied music and singing as a child. She was also a skilful needlewoman and made all her own clothes. Painting in water-colours was her hobby, and she left many pleasant studies of Cape flowers.

No portrait of Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet was ever painted. She would not even consent to visit a photographer's studio for a portrait; so that the few pictures of her in existence are mere snapshots.

When she died on August 2, 1906, General Louis Botha, General Smuts, "Onze Jan" Hofmeyr and Olive Schreiner wrote tributes to her memory. General Hertzog called her "South Africa's most

honourable woman." One newspaper declared that if she had been a man, she would have become Prime Minister of the Cape Colony.

Two years after her sister's death the old house was put up to auction and sold to the Union Government for £2,800. The sale of household treasures went on for days and fetched more than £8,000. Even in 1913 there were people who realized the value of the house and its furniture as a national memorial. Their subscriptions, with government and municipal grants, meant that most of the finest relics remained in the Koopmans-de Wet house. Today the contents are insured for £20,000 - a far too modest estimate when you remember that one gabled wardrobe alone is worth more than £500.

It is not generally known that all this wealth of carved and polished wood, the silver, brass and china, might have been lost for ever. Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet once almost made up her mind to bequeath the collection to Groot Constantia. If she had done so, the fire in 1925 would have destroyed everything.

The old house is more impressive today than it has been at any time since the death of Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet. Everything has been restored, from the flat roof to the simple facade remodelled by Thibault at the end of the eighteenth century.

Mrs. Joan Beck, the resident custodian (whose grandmother often lunched there with Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet) had nine layers of wall-paper removed so that the walls downstairs could be painted in the original parchment colour. Teak beams in the courtyard have been revived with linseed; floors and armoires, wall-cupboards and corner cabinets gleam as they did in the days of Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet's busy housemaids.

By shrewd guesswork and common-sense, Mrs. Beck has arranged the furniture in a manner that would have won the approval of the keen-eyed Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet. It is warm and more intimate than any ordinary museum. A family could move in there and live nobly in the style of past centuries.

Downstairs in the reception room, with its stinkwood muurkas and pieces of Delft, it is easy to imagine the leaders of the anticonvict agitation planning the famous boycott. There, too, Fairbairn, Porter and Stockenstroom met Dr. de Wet and drew up the first parliamentary constitution for the Cape.

Across the hall is the dining-room, with the table once used by Lord Charles Somerset. The superb Sheffield plate, the candelabra and tureens were bought by the Van Bredas of Oranjezicht with money paid to them by the British Government when the slaves were freed.

One of the most magnificent pieces in the house (one that Mrs. Beck would select if she were given a choice) is the huge brass candelabrum hanging in the lower hall. It came from the Dutch Lutheran Church in Strand Street and bears the name of Martinus Lawrens Smith.

The kitchen has come through the years almost unaltered. Here is the deep Dutch bread oven; the high smoke chamber where Mrs. Koopmans-

de Wet curved her hams; the coffee-roaster, burnished copper pans and kettles, the charcoal receptacles and cake moulds. You can almost smell the briedies and newly-baked loaves in that faultless old kitchen.

A large vat and teak brass-bound bucket are reminders that there were no water-pipes when the first of the de Wets occupied the house-and for long afterwards. They had to send their servants to the communal well opposite the Martin Melck House. Even in her last years Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet had no bathroom. The water was heated in the kitchen and carried upstairs.

The “Koopmans room” upstairs is the room in which Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet died. Her massive stinkwood wardrobe, with its wide satinwood panels and rich carving, stands in its old place. But the four-post rosewood bed with fluted posts was brought in after her death - a gift from the late Dr. F. W. Purcell, once honorary curator of the house.

Margaretha Jacoba de Wet occupied the “De Wet room” upstairs, separated from her sister by a gallery. This room lacks a bed, and Mrs. Beck would welcome a four-poster of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Here, too, are the original wardrobes. One is ebony and satinwood with claw feet, and is regarded by experts as the finest known example of Cape craftsmanship. It is an eighteenth-century piece, carved in Cape Town by Oriental cabinet-makers.

Almost as old as the house, older than any piece of furniture within, is the gigantic vine in the courtyard. Planted at least two centuries ago, the roots must stretch far beyond Strand Street. No one has been able to identify the species, but a Stellenbosch professor recently took cuttings and the mystery may be cleared up within the next few years. The vine was nearly devoured by caterpillars not long ago; but it has been pruned and sprayed and it still produces stunted bunches of very sweet grapes.

One grim touch is given to the house by Van Noodt’s chair. The merciless governor is

supposed to have died in this straight back armchair at the very moment at which four deserters - sentenced by Van Noodt - went to the gallows. "*Noodt is dood*," they sang joyfully in Cape Town that day.

Leibbrandt, the first Keeper of the Archives, made a careful search in an effort to confirm this legend. At the end he wrote: "I am sorry to say there is nothing to show it was not the chair of somebody else, or that it really is a chair of any historical value whatever."

When you step on to the klompie brick stoep and into the low, cool rooms of the Koopmans-de Wet House you are in a more leisurely world. It is alive with the beauty of eighteenth-century clocks, lacquer cabinets, camphor and oak chests; with honest furniture and delicate glasses; chairs with carved foliage, aquatints and Cape silver worked by Lotter and Schmidt. The rooms are rich and alive, but not crowded. Even the brass cannon used by Janssens at Blaauwberg does not intrude on the calm atmosphere. The slave bell, old Bibles, steep staircases, the heraldry and

Cheval glasses - this is indeed a long step back from the roaring street outside.

As a child Maria Margaretha de Wet looked through the small-paned windows of this house on to a vastly different town. She watched her grandmother, Mrs. Horak, being carried to church in a sedan-chair; and she lived to see the green-and-yellow electric tram-cars grinding up Strand Street. All this from a house built within the first half-century of Van Riebeeck's settlement.

In those last years, indeed, Mrs. Koopmans-de-Wet must have known that her restful house had become the most historic and romantic home in South Africa.

Most enthusiastic of all collectors of Africana (in the wider sense of the word) are the connoisseurs of old Cape silver. It is worth collecting, for some of the silversmiths of eighteenth and early nineteenth century Cape Town were equal to the skilled craftsmen of Europe.

Not so long ago Cape silver passed unrecognised and fetched low prices. Masses of beautiful work went into the melting pot when the price of silver rose during the Napoleonic wars, and again during the First World War. Many fine early examples were taken out of the country by Dutch East India Company officials, so that you would have to comb Holland to re-discover the lost treasures.

Connoisseurs tell me that it is now too late to start a serious collection of Cape silver - unless you happen to be extremely wealthy. The days are gone when you could find a magnificent sugar-bowl by D. H. Schmidt in a pawnbroker's window. Antique dealers may be able to offer you an odd fork or spoon; but a superb piece of hollow-ware seldom comes on the market. Much old Cape silver has the sentimental value of heirlooms and is kept in the family.

Cape silver only began to acquire a special value after Union, when shrewd people from all parts of the country flocked to Cape Town for the Parliamentary session. They saw and admired the

old Cape furniture and silver; and heavy buying sent up the prices. Books, pictures and other forms of art shared in the boom. During both wars the prices rose still higher. But only within the past decade has it been possible to identify most pieces of Cape silver with certainty. There are still mysteries to be solved.

In 1936, after long research in the archives, Mrs. Mollie N. Morrison brought out a valuable work containing the marks and symbols of Cape silversmiths. At that time, however, she estimated that no more than 300 pieces of Cape silver remained in existence. Later research has proved that there are many more. Three collections in the Union each contain 300 pieces; so that the total may reach 2000 pieces.

Probably the leading private collector in South Africa today is Mr. David Heller of Claremont. Mr. Heller, a former civil servant, became an antique dealer when he retired. Now he devotes himself entirely to the study of old Cape silver, and he has published a richly-illustrated book on

the subject - "A History of Cape Silver-1700-1870."

Mr. Heller's interest was aroused as long ago as 1903, when his father left him a presentation silver snuff-box. Since then Mr. Heller has traced the careers and the marks of dozens of silversmiths. He can tell Cape silver at a glance.

"It looks different," says Mr. Heller. "There is a typical Yellowish tinge about it. Cape Town silversmiths melted down coins - everything from rix-dollars to pieces-of-eight; and true to human nature, they used more alloys than they would have done if the trade had been controlled."

Mr. Heller has never found a piece of seventeenth-century Cape silver, and he does not expect to find anything earlier than 1700. A silversmith named Jan Hendricksz arrived at the Cape in 1689; but not a scrap of his work has ever been identified.

It is clear, however, that several craftsmen were at work in 1715, for Governor de Chavonnes

issued a Placaat regulating the gold and silver trade and appointing master assayers. He introduced the assay mark of "Hope standing." The guild of silversmiths, however, appears to have ignored the Placaat and each man invented his own mark - a bird, an anchor, a crown, often used in addition to the figure of Hope. Some of these early silversmiths were sword cutlers in the Castle armoury. They secured burgher papers from time to time and set up in business for themselves.

Eighteenth century Cape silver provides more artistic examples than nineteenth; and after 1850 the old craftsmanship almost died out. The machine age killed it. Silverware came from overseas factories, not little workshops in the old Langestraat or Noordkaper Steeg.

Among the original Cape Town silversmiths one finds men from many parts of Europe-Joseph Wolfsgruber of Vienna, Frans Wolhuter, a Swiss, Daniel Collinet, a Belgian, Jean Thomas of France; while Daniel Heinrich Schmidt and the famous Lotter family were Germans. Schmidt had

an assistant in 1794 with the resounding name of Bonaventura Fleischer. They had their apprentices, too, and some fine silver was made by a slave named Dollie (trained by Schmidt) and Cadier Abdol, a Malay. After the British occupation came English craftsmen like Adams and Arrowsmith, and a Scot named John Maclachlan.

Cape silver took many shapes. Early work includes some beautiful church silver; a baptismal font for the Dutch Reformed Church in the Heerengracht was made in 1752 by John Hasse; while Gerhardus Lotter made the fine chalice in the Lutheran Church, Strand Street. Schmidt made a salver and Bible clasps.

From references in the archives, however, it is plain that some church silver has vanished. You can still see good examples in the Braak museum at Stellenbosch, the Huguenot museum at Paarl, and the Dutch Reformed Church at Stellenbosch.

Snuff-boxes were made in the shape of books; or tiny tortoiseshells or sea-shells were used and decorated with silver. There were pistols inlaid

with silver, tea-pots and coffee-pots, hair-combs, silver-mounted pipes, thimbles, buckles, buttons, sugar-tongs, brandy-warmers and magnificent trays. Most typical of all Cape silver pieces is the “sucriere,” the form of sugar-bowl developed in Cape Town.

Then there were the silver furniture fittings, a special branch of the art. Daniel Heinrich Schmidt evidently loved this most ornamental work; he brought roses into many of his designs; his handles, key-plates and escutcheons, seen against the deep tones of stinkwood or mahogany, make an inspiring combination of two different arts.

Schmidt, in the opinion of experts, was the finest craftsman of them all. He came from Strelitz as a sword-cutler in 1768; and his initials with a bunch of grapes formed his mark. Fortunately a great deal of his work, carried out during 43 years at the Cape, has survived.

Cecil John Rhodes collected Cape silver; and among the finest pieces at Groote Schuur there is a silver tea-pot by Schmidt. There, too, is a

noteworthy silver tessie, lined with copper, and designed to hold the charcoal embers from which smokers lit their pipes. Most experts, however, would agree that Schmidt reached his zenith when he made the square salver now in the Africana Museum in Johannesburg. The date is 1780, and the salver "is engraved with the arms and supporters of the Van Rhee de van Oudtshoorn family. Here again are Schmidt's roses enriching the carved border.

The name of Lotter crops up more often than any other, for generation after generation of Lotters worked in Cape Town as silversmiths. The first was Matthys Lotter of Augsburg, a famous centre for silverware when Matthys left there in 1734. Between that year and 1830, the Lotters produced more Cape silver than any other craftsmen. Gerhardus Lotter, the eighth and last of the line, was also a wardmaster from 1802 to 1824. Many of the silversmiths were influential people, serving as members of church councils and marriage officers. The silversmith families often intermarried, and no doubt their hereditary skill

was intensified in this way. Incidentally the old suburb of Papendorp took its name from a silversmith, Pieter van Papendorp.

Among the British silversmiths was Lawrence Twentyman, an 1820 settler who opened a watchmaker's shop at 30, Heerengracht. His work is easily identified by the initials "L.T.," often accompanied by a bird, triple-towered castle and sovereign's head. A fine Twentyman snuff-box is to be seen in the Africana Museum, Johannesburg.

Experts have not yet detected forgeries in the world of old Cape silver, but they expect to encounter them any day now. A snuff-box priced at £3 twenty years ago may well be worth ten times that amount at the present time. Few teapots have been discovered bearing Cape marks, and rich collectors would pay an almost fantastic price for a fine specimen. Mr. Heller examined a cup made early last century which was insured for £1000. At a recent auction sale ten table-forks made by Jan Lotter fetched 45 guineas.

Cape silversmiths also worked in gold, but this is rare indeed. A gold hair ornament in the Koopmans-de Wet House is probably the only specimen on display in Cape Town; while the Africana Museum in Johannesburg has a pair of gold buckles made by Jan Brewis in 1817. Mr. Heller doubts whether a dozen gold pieces could be found in South Africa today. Gold has gone into the melting pot far more often than silver. If only the owners had known ...

Enough silver remains to recall in all its richness that long period of personal skill. Here is a three-pronged cake-fork by W. G. Lotter; there a crested soup-ladle. Marrow-scoops, butter-knives, fish-slices, mustard-spoons, napkin-rings - they are fit for a royal banquet. Egg-cups, corkscrews with mother-o'-pearl handles, inkstands, bells, candlesticks and casseroles ... the silversmith could never have found his work monotonous.

Cape silver is Cape Town's lost art. If you can trace the grapes of Schmidt on a long-disused teapot, you will reveal a treasure indeed.

All over the Cape countryside are large and small collections of historic objects. Everything from furniture to guns, old fashioned clothes to Bushman arrows, is to be found in the fascinating local museums.

At Caledon, for example, Mrs. Ben Kruger has a private collection of bottles started by her aunt, the late Mrs. Tienie Neethling, more than sixty years ago. There are well over three thousand bottles on her shelves ... a stone bottle hollowed out by Bushmen, a Voortrekker wine bottle, almost every sort of perfume, medicine, brandy and liqueur bottle used at the Cape. Old wine barrels and horn glasses are also to be found in this unusual display.

Colonel C. P. Nel of Oudtshoorn built up a private museum which is now supported by the municipality. It is noteworthy for a unique collection of old motor-cars, starting with a chain-driven 1898 model. As a contrast, there is a Voortrekker *perdewa* (horse-drawn carriage) built in 1837 at Murraysburg.

Swellendam has a fine cavalcade of farm implements, including an ingenious mealie and bean planter invented by a local farmer long before the first American machinery reached the Cape. The planter was made entirely of wood except for a small tin hopper, and it worked. Old buck-wagons are to be found here, and many other relics which might have decayed in the barns of the district.

Mr. J. B. Wolfaart of Laingsburg displays Bushman relics found in the neighbourhood, fossils, and a complete set of wagon-brakes of all patterns used during the past century. The small town of Fort Beaufort has set aside an officer's mess of the Kaffir War period to house the historical relics of the district; early types of barbed wire, the first telegraph instruments used there, and a wide range of military exhibits. In Graaff Reinet they say that every home is a museum; certainly there is a wealth of antiques. The Booysen family has a wooden and brass footbath which was in use for centuries - carried round by a slave after evening devotions. Everywhere you go you are

shown ancient clocks and watches, lace caps and jewellery, walking-sticks, violins, Huguenot heirlooms, quill pens and sand boxes for drying letters.

Worcester is proud of its Afrikaner Museum, with the greying lock of President Kruger's hair, the shoes worn by Professor J. du Plessis during his walk across Africa, old wedding dresses and home-plaited straw hats and embroidered pillow-cases. Paarl, of course, rightly specialises 'in Huguenot relics. One of the prizes of the collection is a 1657 leather-bound Bible containing a summary of Paarl events between the years 1800 and 1806. There is a wooden crucifix brought from France by the de Villiers family, and much priceless furniture.

Tulbagh's museum, the "Oude Kerk Volks-museum van 't Land van Waveren," is housed in the oldest church building in all South Africa. A grim story, going back to 1799 (fifty-six years after the church was built) is told of this white-walled place of worship. Sextant Leendert Haasbroek had to reprimand a coloured boy for failing to dust the

voetstofies, pulpit and chandeliers. The boy cut his master's throat; but as he lay dying, Haasbroek warned the boy that the truth would come out, "even if the crows told the story." The boy escaped detection at the time; but years later, while he was resting under a tree, he heard a flock of crows screeching in the branches and imagined they were proclaiming his guilt. He confessed and went to the gallows on the outskirts of the village, at a spot still known as Galgenveld. Haasbroek's widow was appointed sexton and filled the post for five years - the only woman sexton ever known in the Cape. The museum retains the religious character of the church; pulpit, chairs, footstools are as they were in the ill-fated Haasbroek's day.

All the country museums are rich in firearms. This is a gun-loving land; and all but the earliest muskets are represented. I have yet to hear of the discovery of a matchlock such as Van Riebeeck's men used; but flintlocks of the seventeenth century have been found.

Arquebuses or hackbutts stood in Van Riebeeck's armoury, and were used to kill lions and big-

game. The bell-mouthed blunderbuss (or *donderbus* in Dutch) arrived in 1675, and called for strength, patience and nerve. It took fifteen minutes to reload, so the marksman had to keep a pike or cutlass handy. Big charges were rammed into the old, long guns and the kick must have been devastating.

Flintlock muskets were deadly enough to kill off most of the game round Cape Town by the middle of the eighteenth century. These *roers*, with improvements, remained in use until 1859; and in the museums you will find many types complete with ramrod, bullet-moulds, powder-horns and bullet-pouches.

You will also see the methods by which the platteland marksman made his own bullets. Often the molten lead was poured into reeds and then rolled between stones. Buckshot of a large size were called *lopers*. When the gunpowder sold by the smous was exhausted, farmers made their own explosive mixture of sulphur, saltpetre and willow charcoal. Brandy was sometimes added; and after hours of stamping the mixture was dried on a

skin. It was not as effective as real gunpowder - but they killed lions with it.

Sporting guns, double and single barrel, came to the Cape well before the end of the eighteenth century. One of the early advertisements in the "Cape Gazette" of 1800 announced that John Elmslie, the merchant, sold "buck, partridge and small bird shot." Rifled barrels appeared in 1816, when S. F. Botha, gun maker of No. 23 Boerenplein, advertised "an assortment of excellent rifled and plain gun barrels made by one of the best gun-makers in London."

Tower muskets, horse-pistols, duelling pistols, fearsome elephant guns, *pronk voorlaaier* and *panslaner*, carbines and Mausers - you will find them all in the country museums. Even the doorway of the old church museum at Tulbagh is guarded by guns and pistols. And it is a poor museum indeed which has no cannon.

As General Smuts once said: "These antiques of South Africa are a common heritage of which all South Africans are proud, and they are the

precious links binding us all together in noble traditions and great memories of our past."

CHAPTER 16 FOR SMOKERS ONLY

TOBACCO HAS BEEN GROWN On farms between my stoep and the mountains since the seventeenth century. Even now you can find the old-fashioned "Boer tobacco" kraals where the plants thrive in rich sheep manure.

Van Riebeeck brought the first tobacco with him. "Indian weed," he called it, and very soon the Hottentots and Bushmen were begging for it. Tobacco and alcohol were supreme among trade goods; strange natives appeared at the Castle, bringing cows and asking for tobacco and strong drink. The length of the "twist" had to equal the length of the beast.

For nearly thirty years little tobacco was planted at the Cape. Indeed, it was forbidden. Officials thought the colonists would devote too much of their time to tobacco cultivation when grain was needed. Some disobeyed the placat and bartered

their secret tobacco crops for ivory and cattle - to the detriment of the Honourable Company's trading monopoly. The company sold tobacco, and in 1700 the price was four heavy skillings a pound retail. They did a roaring trade.

First official plantation at the Cape was Rustenberg at Rondebosch. An expert named Cors Hendricks came from Holland in 1719 to supervise the work; but the crop was a failure. Hendricks blamed the weather.

Later crops were more successful. Then one unknown pioneer discovered that the finest place to grow tobacco was within the walls of a sheep or cattle kraal. Connoisseurs decided that sheep kraals produced a more palatable tobacco; the cattle manure gave the leaf a satisfying "bite." Gradually a method was evolved which survives to this day.

They sowed in May, cut down the golden leaves in January, and dried them under the oaks for a month. Then the leaves were stripped from the stalks and made up into bundles, twenty leaves to

a bundle, tied with *matjiesgoed*. The bundles were hung over the rafters of a loft.

Next came the twisting process. First the leaves were steeped in the ash of the succulent shrub called *litjiesbos*; or *witblits* might be used to impart a distinctive tang. When the tobacco had fermented sufficiently it was twisted into long strings, each six or eight pounds in weight. Much of the inferior tobacco, the cattle kraal variety, was used for sheep dip. Boer tobacco with the correct rich brown appearance and inviting aroma was smoked, chewed or used as snuff.

"Boer tobacco" was taken to America early last century by the New England whaling skippers who called at the Cape. It was relished by those tough old mariners; though it must be admitted that the quality was dubious.

Before the days of scientific tobacco production, one area in the Cape gained a reputation for tobacco far above the average.

This tobacco was grown in a sheltered valley on top of Piketberg mountain. The Versfelds of

Mouton's Vlei had tobacco lands under irrigation before the end of last century; their pipe tobacco, with its typical perfume, often fetched a shilling a pound. Further down the same valley the Lucas family grew the famous "Lucas tobacco," stronger than the Versfeld brand; and this found eager buyers in Cape Town at four shillings a pound. Boer tobacco at that time could be bought in the villages for a penny or two pence a pound, and only an exceptional leaf fetched sixpence. Turkish tobacco was first grown experimentally in 1905. It spread from the Franschhoek Valley to other districts, and the modern industry was established.

Smoking was dangerous in the days of thatch. Early in the eighteenth century Kolben recorded that "sailors and Hottentots found smoking in the streets of Cape Town were given lashes." And as late as 1873 a man was awarded fourteen days hard labour for lighting his pipe in a Beaufort West street.

Three years later Mr. C. Ray, passenger in a train in the Cape, was charged with smoking in a non-

smoking compartment. His defence was that he had obtained the permission of his fellow travellers. However, the evidence proved that he had knocked the ashes of his cigar through a lamp-hole into the next compartment, and the ash had gone into a lady's eye. When fined £3, the prisoner remarked: "This was the first time I had ever been in a train, and I shall take care it is the last."

They smoked clay pipes in the early days, but the deep-bowled calabash was discovered by the Hottentots and adopted by many Europeans last century. Calabash is probably the only South African "timber" (if you can call it that) which is suitable for pipe-making. This capacious pipe gives a sweet, cool smoke. It had enjoyed periods of popularity at various times; usually when briars were unobtainable. Farmers in the Worcester and other districts have sown calabash seeds and produced the gourds, but the demand has never been steady, and no fortunes have been made from the calabash crop.

First cigarette smoker in the Cape, I believe, was George Thompson, the Cape Town merchant who travelled into little known parts of the country and published a book in 1823. He rolled his own cigarettes. It was not until the 1870's that cigarette smoking became widespread, and women did not smoke openly until the South African War period. Even then, these bold women were mainly visitors from England.

Up to February, 1833, smokers at the Cape lit up with the aid of tinder boxes. Then the first "lucifers" arrived, and the "South African Commercial Advertiser" published instructions on the use of the new "instantaneous light." Citizens were told that "lucifer matches ignite by the friction produced by drawing the match through a piece of sandpaper." And there was this solemn warning: "Avoid inhaling the gas that escapes from the combustion of the black composition."

There were a hundred lucifers in each box. It was not long before the newspapers announced that two white children had been poisoned after eating lucifers. Wax matches first reached the Cape in

1858, "warranted to light in any climate, even if dipped in water." The first Cape match factory was started in 1883 by Mr. Ludolph at Wynberg. He employed fifty people and used local timber. It took Mr. Ludolph some time to master the process, however, for his early matches had an alarming trick of exploding in their cases.

Early this century came the first of the cigarette coupons, the great tobacco-sponsored competitions for guessing the gold output, and the feverish collection of cigarette packet "fronts" which could be exchanged for cash. Some firms gave leather-bound books for "fronts"; and many a library of classics survives from those days.

Between the World Wars the cigarette coupon business reached its greatest heights. You could use them as money, furnish your house with them, or exchange 75,000 coupons for a motor-car. The Trade Coupons Act of 1935 put an end to an exciting enterprise. Today, I think, the law has gone too far. It is now illegal to pack a harmless cigarette card.

Snuff is in far greater demand in the country than you might imagine. Most of it is made in Cape Town, and about twenty-five tons go up in sneezes every year. Riebeek Square was the centre of this romantic trade in the days when the square was a fashionable shopping area. Many an ox-wagon left old Johannes Stemmet's store loaded with snuff which would be bartered in the hinterland for skins and other produce.

Johannes Stemmet was a descendant of a family of snuff-makers in Holland. He founded his business in Cape Town in the 'thirties of last century, and he was also the owner of a private grain mill. He had many secret formulae for the golden dust he sold; but the most expensive snuff in his shop was green and contained bay leaf and orange leaf. That cost £1 a pound.

I have a memory of the Stemmet store, in the days when the original Johannes Stemmet's son Johan Hendrik was in charge of the business. The craftsmen worked in a golden haze of sunlight and snuff. In the bins I saw the cheap, dark snuff that the coloured people were buying in penny cones;

and there were mixtures scented with oil of lavender and attar of roses for wealthier customers. The men who worked there said that they never suffered from headaches or colds. Snuff, they declared, drove all germs out of the head. And it is true that during the deadly influenza plague of 1918 many snuff-takers remained immune. In the old days there was an idea that snuff was good for the soul. Certainly it clears the head.

Otto Landsberg, the white-bearded snuff-maker of Greenmarket Square, lived to 102 – “thanks to snuff.” When he died in 1905 the “Cape Argus” stated that he had never suffered from any sort of disease during his long life. He founded a local musical society, played first violin, and painted hundreds of pictures. No doubt a few of you remember him. As a young man (he often recalled) he had attended a sale of slaves on the Grand Parade and bought himself a cook. In 1886 his firm produced the once-famous “Cape Favourite” cigarettes. When he reached the century mark a huge portrait of Otto Landsberg was displayed in a show-case on the Cape Town railway station.

He was probably the oldest white resident when he died.

Snuff is made by grinding and sifting tobacco leaves to a powder. Then come the fermenting, blending and flavouring processes which combine to produce the perfect sneeze. Some of the old Cape Town snuff-makers memorised their formulae and they were passed on verbally from generation to generation.

The quality of snuff depends largely on the degree of fermentation, a delicate process which may be disturbed by the weather. Snuff is sold under romantic names - "Black Rappee" and "Macuba," "Lavande," "Old Paris" and "Masulipatam." Rappees are still widely used; they are granulated, whereas "Spanish snuff" and other varieties are finely milled.

The snuff-makers also dealt in snuff-boxes. You can still see valuable heirlooms in the shape of snuff-boxes in city antique shops and distant farmhouses. Not long ago I saw one with a bird which sang, opened its beak and fluttered its

plumage of peacock feathers. That one was sold for more than fifty guineas. There was also the celebrated Juritz snuff-box, given to the late Dr. C. F. Juritz, Danish Consul in Cape Town, by King Frederick VII of Denmark. It was made of gold, platinum and diamonds, and fetched £350 when it was sold in 1936.

Members of Parliament enjoy the use of official snuff. Ever since the early days of the Old Cape House, the Sergeant-at-Arms has kept a silver snuff-box close at hand. In the present House of Assembly there is a special ledge for it next to his chair. And it is more than a Victorian tradition. Members empty that box every week.

CHAPTER 17

FARMS OF THE KAPENAARS

KAPENAARS, THE PEOPLE OF THE Cape Peninsula called themselves in the seventeenth century and long afterwards. The farmers beyond the Cape Flats were "Afrikaanders."

Some of the Kapenaars, of course, had farms. The old homesteads have not all disappeared,

though nearly all the land has been covered by the city and the suburbs. Only in the Constantia valley are the original farms of the Kapenaars to some extent preserved. Elsewhere you will search almost in vain for the fields that once produced so much fruit and green stuff for the ships that came to the “Tavern of the Seas.”

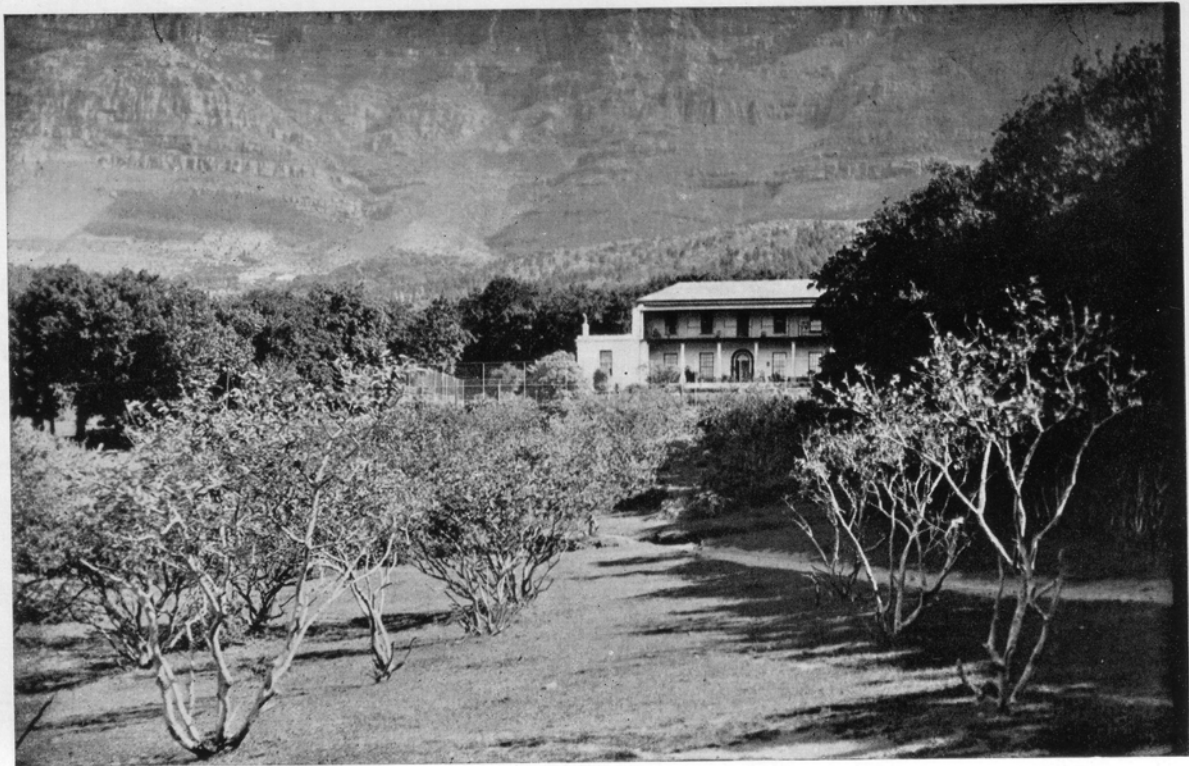
Yet there are many people still living who remember the flourishing farms on the Table Mountain slopes. My friend the philatelist, Mr. Adrian Albert Jurgens, showed me an oil painting of his father, surrounded by cattle, in a meadow which has been obliterated by the houses of Tamboers Kloof. It was called Leeuwenvoet farm, granted to a Jurgens ancestor in the early days; for the first Jurgens arrived only ten years after Van Riebeeck.

Bordering on Leeuwenvoet was the farm Tamboers Kloof, owned by the Spengler family. Mr. Jurgens does not accept the legend of a Malay named Tamboer; he says there is a little kloof shaped like a drum - hence the name. One of the Spenglers married into the Jurgens family,

and then the joint property stretched across the face of the mountain from Signal Hill and Kloof Nek to the stone wall built by the Van Bredas of Oranje Zigt to prevent their cattle from straying.

Oranje Zigt (not Orangezicht as it is often spelt) was granted to Durand Loubser in 1709, but Pieter van Breda acquired it twenty-two years later and it remained in the family for 170 years. Some say there was an orange grove on the farm early in the eighteenth century; others think the name was given in honour of the Prince of Orange; or because there was a view from the homestead of the Oranje bastion of the Castle. Certainly it has the finest view in Cape Town.

Unlike nearly all the other early homesteads, the house that Pieter van Breda built had two storeys. Massive teak and yellowwood timbers were used for the doors, interior arches and staircases. The first building was thatched, but during alterations a century ago a slate roof was provided and a verandah with cast-iron pillars added to the stoep.



Oranje Zigt homestead, which was in possession of the Van Breda family for 170 years.

Pieter van Breda and his successor Michael kept three hundred slaves on the farm. The slaves occupied a long building running along the present Upper Orange Street; and close by was a large duck-pond and the entrance gate with an avenue of pines. The slave bell near the house pealed at sunrise, noon, one p.m., at sunset, and also as a bush fire alarm. It could be heard as far away as Papendorp.

The farm catered mainly for ships. Cabbages were pulled out of the ground roots and all so that they would remain fresh longer at sea. Each field was protected by oak trees, and the Van Bredas had their own irrigation system from the Table Mountain streams. They grew their own coffee.

In front of the homestead stood a flagpole. When the hospitable Van Bredas hoisted their flag, it was the signal for master mariners and their pursers, burghers and their wives, to drive up to Oranje Zigt - to buy the farm produce and to be entertained. They wandered through the fruit and vegetable gardens, filled their carts and baskets, and then made their way to the bandstand. You

can still find the decaying brickwork of the bandstand, with its circle of trees. Once there were flower-beds, shady walks and running streams. Wine, cakes and sweets were served while the slave musicians played their fiddles and flutes. And you may be sure that no one enjoyed the old-world courtesies of that lovely farm more than the men from the ships in Table Bay.

Strangest of all legends of Oranje Zigt (and it has many, with ghosts among them) is that of a wealthy leper who lived on the estate long ago with many slaves to attend to his needs. I doubt whether there is a word of truth in it, but Ian Colvin perpetuated the story in his play "The Leper's Flute." The only support is to be found in the name Verlaten Bosch, a part of the estate where the Van Bredas are said to have provided sanctuary for some afflicted person.

One of the Oranje Zigt ghosts is an early Van Breda who rides round the farm on a white horse. Or so the Malays say. The other is more recent. Early this century a Mr. A. J. Fuller took a photograph of the dining-room fireplace - a long

time exposure. When he developed his plate, there was a man in the leather chair beside the fireplace. I know that such pictures have often been faked, and I give the incident for what it is worth. The picture is in the collection of a well-known Cape Town historian. The back of the chair can be traced through the ghostly figure.

There is an Oranje Zigt legend which is common to many old Cape homesteads, and which probably has some factual basis. In the eighteenth century the slaves rose from time to time against their masters, and many a family was murdered. When the slaves at Oranje Zigt ran amok, a slave nurse decided to save the Van Breda baby in her care. She chose an oven (fortunately cold) as the most secure hiding place, and the baby survived the massacre.

As a farm, Oranje Zigt flourished in spite of shocks. The abolition of slavery did not put the Van Bredas out of business; nor did the loss of shipping customers which followed the opening of the Suez Canal. But in 1882 the authorities expropriated the whole water-supply. That was

the end. The family wished to sell; but in 1834 the Hon. Michael van Breda had bequeathed the estate to his descendants with the stipulation that "the property shall for ever and for as long as the law of the colony permits, remain the hereditary possession of the Van Breda family." It took an Act of Parliament to release the estate from that entailment. In 1901 a company bought Oranje Zigt for £40,000. The estate had gone up in value since Durand Loubser bought it for 18,000 rix dollars (£1350), and it has risen again since then to a figure beyond the wildest imaginings of all the old owners.

Lower down in Table Valley were other fine farms. The late Sir John Kotze was brought up at Leeuwenhof, now the official residence of the Administrator of the Cape, a seventeenth century estate. Landdrost Zorn was selling the Leeuwenhof produce to the townsfolk in 1815, and famous botanists praised the garden.

Even in the middle of last century it was so wild up there in Hof Street that leopards came down from the mountain in search of poultry. Sir John

Kotze used to relate a boyhood experience, when he walked across to Belvedere in response to a message from Mr. Michiel Smuts. A leopard had killed a calf near the homestead, and returned to the carcass two nights later. Mr. Smuts was waiting in an oak tree with a shotgun loaded with loopers. When young Kotze arrived the dead leopard was hanging from a bough.

Old prints show these homesteads set in flourishing acres - Nooitgedacht the “unexpected,” Waterhof of the Hofmeyrs with its terraced gardens, Rheezicht, Weltevreden, Welgemeend, Leeuwenkuil and Roodehek. They looked out over the bay from high stoeps paved with slate and shaded by vines. Those houses were solid. Houses with ballrooms and cool halls, carved staircases and louvered shutters, fanlights and curved steps built of the small Batavian bricks. Even the coach-houses and out-buildings had their garlanded mouldings. Those old Kapenaars knew how to live.

High above the present Woodstock stood Zonnebloem, the “sunflower,” with title-deeds going

back to 1707. Round the corner in the seventeenth century was a group of four farms - Valkenburg, Welgelegen, Zorgvliet and Koorenhoop. The original Koorenhoop homestead belonged to the Coetzee family; and a quaint dovecote, built by a Chinese artisan, stood in the grounds. Koorenhoop was sub-divided many years ago, and part of it, renamed Westhoe, became the home of the Willmot family. Westhoe homestead was at least two centuries old; and the vineyards and wheat fields ran along the present Mowbray main road. The late Mr. A. L. Willmot kept dairy cows at Westhoe until 1929, when a new municipal regulation put him out of business. He was one of the last of the Kaapenaars.

Further along the road is Rustenburg, where grain was sown four years after Van Riebeeck's landing. They called it Ronde Doorn Bossien in those days; and the “Company's house,” built there in 1657, became a summer resort for the Governors, where they could “inhale the fresh country air.” Rustenburg supplied Stellenbosch and Drakenstein with young oaks. Rustenburg

sent the first Cape wine to Europe. The estate was still producing wine until well into the nineteenth century. Mountain fires destroyed the original homestead, but garden seats and a summer house have survived as relics of the “lust huys” of the old Dutch governors.

Rondebosch was the earliest outpost of the Kape-naars. Van Riebeeck stationed two men there, in what he describes as a “house of sods,” to see that the Hottentots did not destroy the crops. The house with earth walls became Groote Schuur; and close by were Onder Schuur and Kleine Schuur. I always admire the neat orchard of Kleine Schuur from the top of the trolley-bus. Onder Schuur, of course, has become Westbrooke.

Stellenberg at Claremont became an estate towards the end of the seventeenth century and survived until this century. Many architects regard the homestead as the most beautiful in the Cape, dignified, aloof, and mellowed by the years.

Many elderly people in Cape Town remember the last of the windmills. Those white towers with sails lingered on long after other mills were being driven by steam. Sixty years ago a few old windmills were still grinding the corn of the Kapenaars in the Cape Peninsula.

Finest example of a Dutch-pattern windmill in the Cape is Mostert’s Mill, an historical monument on the Groote Schuur estate. For years it stood neglected. Now it has been so fully restored that it is capable of grinding wheat again as soon as the great wings are set whirling.

Horse-mills were used before windmills, and the first of them was set up within six years of Van Riebeeck’s landing. The horse walked round all day pulling a huge wooden cog-wheel which rotated a driving shaft. The timber soon rotted, and the horse-mill was replaced by a water-mill somewhere in the present St. George’s Street. A later water-mill built behind the Company’s garden gave the name to Mill Street. In those days people brought their own “grist to the mill,”

paying the miller two stuivers a bushel. A two-pound loaf of bread cost 1½d.

Windmills were built before the end of the seventeenth century. These early contraptions suffered so heavily in the south-easters, however, that in 1717 the Council of Seventeen sent out masons, carpenters and materials for a first-class windmill. It was owned by the Burgher Council, and for years this mill ground practically all the Peninsula's grain.

You will find the remains of this mill, the celebrated Oude Molen, forming part of a small Anglican church at Maitland. The two grinding stones have been preserved. When the farm on which the mill was built was advertised for sale in 1843, the mill was stated to be "in full working order and surpassing in power any mill in this colony."

It is hard to identify the mill described by Otto Mentzel in his "Cape of Good Hope" published in 1785. "There is a windmill behind the Devil's Mountain which, though outside the town, comes

under the control of the burgher councillors," he wrote. "The mill is of brick in the characteristic Dutch style; its head, wings and mill shaft turn according to the direction of the wind. The wings are formed of wooden frames covered with canvas sails, that may be furled or unfurled at pleasure. It is, therefore, possible to use the mill both when the wind is strong and when there is only a slight breeze."

Mostert's Mill is behind the "Devil's Mountain," but if the date carved on the wooden cog-wheel is correct it was not built until 1796. It was a private mill on the farm Welgelegen, then owned by the Van Reenens. In the middle of the eighteenth century the farm was bought by Sybrand Mostert, and the Mostert family remained in possession until 1889. Wilks, the new owner, sold it to Cecil John Rhodes two years later.

Mentzel also had a word to say about bread in Cape Town, and from his description one suspects that the bread of the late eighteenth century was more palatable than some of the twentieth century bread.

“The products of the Cape bakeries are of a high order,” declared Mentzel. “Only the best grade white wheat is used for grinding into flours. The grain is well ground at the windmills and then sifted into various grades. One baker specialises in confectionery, cakes, pastries and so forth, provided the harvest is good and corn plentiful, for should there be a bad season the Council of Policy would prohibit the making of sweetmeats and then the pastry-cook would be obliged to bake bread only.”

The art of the millwright died out years ago in the Cape, and a craftsman was brought specially from Holland in 1935, when Mostert’s Mill was restored. He left it exactly as it was in 1796. New sails were supplied by the Netherlands Government.

Outside the walls remained unchanged, but the inside was lined with concrete to carry the newly-thatched revolving roof. A new driving shaft was fashioned from local blue-bum. The “upper and nether millstones” were found on the site. One was put back into service; the other, which had

been broken, was used in the paving outside one of the doors.

Climb the wooden ladder inside the mill, and you find a world of wooden machinery under the thatch. There is the brake; for the sails turn at a mere fifteen revolutions a minute, and the violent winds of the Cape are often too strong for a Dutch windmill. Sometimes the sails must be reefed like the sails of a ship.

Dark green wings, white wind boards, sky blue axle with a golden star - those are the traditional Dutch windmill colours. Mostert’s Mill, with its three-foot walls and flagstones laid by slaves, is a romantic survival indeed.

On the day in 1936 when the mill was set to work again, guests at the ceremony carried away bags of freshly-milled wheat as souvenirs. And among the guests was a Miss Mostert, aged 83, descendant of old Sybrand Mostert.

Cape Town has a home-baking tradition, and until late last century it was not the price of bread that worried the householder, but the price of flour.

Nevertheless the bakers supplied many people. Right through the centuries you will find references to white, brown and coarse loaves - and their prices.

Towards the middle of last century bakers were permitted to make "good and wholesome bread" of the following materials only: wheat, barley, rye, oats, india or caffer corn, potatoes and rice. All bread not made of wheat had to be stamped with the letter "M."

Steam came to Cape Town for flour milling in 1831, the first engine having been imported by Mr. George Prince. Readers of the "Commercial Advertiser" were assured: "Inhabitants need not fear annoyance from smoke, and the air will not be darkened by the new steam engine." By the middle of last century there were nine steam mills in Cape Town; but some of the old windmills and water-mills were still in business.

Mostert's Mill is more than a landmark. It is a gracious monument to the pioneers who brought an old craft to a new country.

One of Cape Town's links with Van Riebeeck and the earliest farmers still lives. In his day it marked the boundary of the little colony - the first frontier ever proclaimed in South Africa. It is the wild almond hedge at Kirstenbosch.

Van Riebeeck planted this hedge with the idea of protecting the farms of the Kapenaars from Hottentot cattle raiders. You can eat the almonds if you soak them in water for a few days to remove a slightly poisonous element; the Hottentots roasted the kernels to make their primitive coffee. No doubt Van Riebeeck chose the wild almond for his hedge because it was an easily available local shrub.

He had been at war with one of the Hottentot clans, the Kaapmans, and was casting round for means of isolating the little settlement. The first plan that entered his mind was a canal from Salt River to Muizenberg. That was turned down when it was estimated that it would cost a million guilders to turn the Cape Peninsula into an island.

Nevertheless it was necessary to provide the Free Burghers with a barrier. Their farms lay along both banks of the Liesbeeck. In his search for something cheap and quick, Van Riebeeck remembered the thorny fences grown by medieval barons in Germany. He also recorded that he had seen “dichte crekelbosch” defences used in the West Indies, and answering the purpose well.

So he surveyed the line of the hedge in February, 1660, from the Salt River mouth to Leendert’s Bosch. Leendert Cornelissen was a free wood-cutter, working at the present Kirstenbosch. Van Riebeeck found the distance to be 3673 roods (about 81 miles), and he thought the barrier would become effective within four or five years.

Stakes had previously been driven into the beach near the Salt River mouth and for some distance inland. Along part of the Liesbeeck the banks were steepened. Three famous block-houses fitted the scheme - Kijkuijt on a sand hill at the Salt River mouth, Keert De Koe between the Salt

River and the Liesbeeck, and Hound Den Bul nearer the forest.

From Rondebosch, where it was easy to cross the shallow Liesbeeck, Van Riebeeck ploughed up a belt twelve feet wide and planted his hedge. He used thorn bushes as well as wild almonds; the fast-growing *steekdoring* among others. The hedge ran in a wide semi-circle; or as Van Riebeeck noted in his diary: “It will enclose the whole settlement, with its agriculture and forests, as in a half-moon.”

Among those who took part in the work were a number of French shipwrecked sailors. It paid for their keep and kept them out of mischief.

No doubt Van Riebeeck was influenced in his decision to build the hedge by the fact that his own vineyard and corn lands on the slopes of the Boscheuval lay within its boundaries. It was a fine and prosperous farm at the time the hedge was planted; for although only eight years had passed since the landing of Van Riebeeck, more than a

thousand fruit trees were growing up, and wine was being pressed from the Muscadel grapes.

Boscheuval has become Bishopscourt, and it is just possible that parts of Van Riebeeck's original homestead were built into the residence of the Archbishop. Some of the oaks, perhaps, were planted by Van Riebeeck, though most of them are due to the policy of the Van der Stels. I expect Van Riebeeck's farm labourers lived on the site of the present Protea village.

Van Riebeeck's wife, the little-known Marie de Querelli, certainly lived at Boscheuval and kept things going while the Commander was busy at the Fort. Her presence in that outpost must also have been in Van Riebeeck's mind when he devised the thick hedge against the Hottentots.

The hedge finished, as Van Riebeeck noted in his diary shortly before Christmas in 1660. Long before it had reached its full growth, however, he realised that the hedge would not answer its original purpose. The settlement was expanding faster than he had anticipated. Already the veld

within the boundaries had become too meagre for the needs of the farmers, and Dutch cattle were grazing beyond the short frontier. Cape Town, even in the early sixteen-sixties, could not be penned up within a tall hedge.

From the Hottentot point of view it was also ineffective. Cattle belonging to the Saldaners were found within the boundary, and the Kaapmans damaged a plantation.

Today you can see part of the hedge without leaving your car. The wild almonds form an almost continuous line from the rockery in Kirstenbosch gardens to the Hen and Chickens rocks on top of Wynberg Hill. The plaque of the Historical Monuments Commission stands at the junction of the Wynberg-Constantia Nek and Kirstenbosch-Constantia Nek roads. The hedge was proclaimed as an historical monument in 1936. The inscription on the plaque reads:

“This hedge of wild almonds was planted in the year 1660 A.D., by order of Commander Jan van Riebeeck to mark the southern frontier

of the Cape Colony, from Kirstenbosch along the Wynberg Hill to a point below the Hen and Chickens Rocks; thence the hedge was continued by a fence of poles across the Camp Ground to the mouth of the Salt River.”

Van Riebeeck included the hedge in his Cape Peninsula map of 1660, and the course of the boundary is marked in Walker’s “Historical Atlas of South Africa.”

The hedge stretches for over a mile along the upper part of the Bishops court estate. At one time the handsome and tenacious almond trees survived in suburban gardens.

I am told that not so many years ago the hedge could be traced near the Kenilworth racecourse. Unaware that they were uprooting history, many gardeners tore up these relics of Van Riebeeck. Builders completed the destruction. Professor R. H. Compton searched in vain for fragments in the Claremont Public Gardens.

After nearly three centuries of growth the hedge is now a thicket of trees, some with trunks more

massive than a man’s body. Botanists have been unable to decide whether these are Van Riebeeck’s original trees, or successors.

Often the hedge must have been reduced to ground level by bush fires. It is probable that the roots are older than the 40ft. shoots. From their size, the roots could easily be 300 years old; but the wild almond provides no accurate clue to its age. The wood burns well, and has also been used for furniture.

Even the fragments of the hedge are noteworthy relics to find so long after the days of Van Riebeeck - “remnants of history which have casually escaped the shipwreck of time.”

CHAPTER 18

SEA AND RIVER FARMS

MANY GARDENERS GROW the pretty Buck Bay Vygies, those sandloving succulents which make a brilliant picture of white and pink, red and orange, in the spring. Not so many people know Buck Bay, an old and unspoilt sanctuary and certainly the most alluring seaside farm I have seen.

As the seagull flies, it is only about twenty-five miles from the Table Bay breakwater to the white, gabled Buck Bay homestead. From the mountain you can see Bok Point and the curve of the bay thirteen miles beyond Melkbosch. But if you go by road, through Mamre and then down to the coast beside the Mud River, along the farm tracks and through the walled farmyard of beautiful Ganze Kraal - if you go that way the distance is nearly sixty miles from Adderley Street.

When you come to think of it, few Cape farm-houses are built right on the beach just above high water mark. Buck Bay homestead is so close to

the sea that a gale some years ago sent waves crashing against the stoep, into the stable and round the back of the two hundred year old house. The place is so solid that not a stone was torn away.

No doubt the first of Van Riebeeck's explorers, following the coast to Saldanha by land or sea, discovered Buck Bay. I can imagine a short party resting thankfully beside the spring of fresh water. Probably they also observed the masses of mussel shells thrown up on the beach. About the middle of the eighteenth century the Dutch East India Company stationed a party of men at Buck Bay to collect the shells for lime.

The square stone building where the labourers slept has a door nowadays. When it was built there was only a slit window and a hatch in the roof. The overseers did not trust these men, for they were convicts. Close by, the warders lived more comfortably in the fine, single-gabled residence under thatch. It is simple and massive, and it fits the landscape without one jarring note.



“Buck Bay homestead is so close to the sea that a gale some years ago sent waves crashing against the stoep.

Buck Bay became a private farm in 1846, when it was granted to Louwrens de Jongh. In those days it was called Bok Rivier, for a little stream enters the bay a mile from the homestead. In 1870 it was bought by Mr. William Duckitt, a grandson of the original William Duckitt of Surrey who settled at the Cape in 1800 as the first official expert appointed to advise the farmers. Mr. Wilfred Duckitt, grandson of the 1870 owner, is now in possession of Buck Bay, and it will be surprising if his descendants are not still there next century. To part with Buck Bay would mean selling an earthly paradise.

Seclusion is not the whole secret of Buck Bay's charm. Nevertheless, it is an advantage to have beach after beach of one's own; to have a sheltered bay where it is nearly always possible to launch a boat; and to be able to fill the boat with fish and crawfish right in front of your stoep.

Tiring of the sea, the owner of Buck Bay can walk inland with a shotgun over his shoulder and return within an hour with a steenbok and a

brace of pheasant. Steenbok, duiker, grysbok and game birds are as plentiful as they were last century. Within the last twenty years Mr. Duckitt and his neighbours have been successful in exterminating the jackal and redbat.

Since then the game has flourished as it did of old. Tommy Fick of Darling, a marvellous tracker, the man who killed "Broken Toe" the jackal, cleared this veld of vermin. But the Buck Bay farm has still to be protected against poachers. For that reason the farm gate is kept locked and the caretaker patrols the boundaries.

Mr. Duckitt runs his young Frieslands at Buck Bay for most of the year. His main farm, of course, is Waylands on the road to Darling, and Buck Bay is his cattle post and holiday resort. I sat with him on a wooden bench overlooking the rocks at Bok Point; and as he told me the story of the farm the spell grew stronger and I could understand how the years would deepen one's affection for this sanctuary within sight of Table Mountain.



Groote Post in the Darling district, home of Hildegonda Duckitt.

Before the railway lines reached Malmesbury and Darling, the coast farmers all passed Buck Bay on their way from Saldanha to Cape Town. Mr. Duckitt showed me the old wagon track crossing a koppie on a headland. "We used to go to town from here on horseback in half a day," he recalled." You can ride on the beaches most of the way if you set out as the tide is falling."

Buck Bay was also one of the favourite New Year camping spots of the Darling farmers during the Cape cart and wagon period. Now that distance is no longer important, they make for Yzerfontein or Melkbosch or Blaauwberg Strand by car.

Until a few years before the Second World War there was no motor road to Buck Bay. Perhaps that is why it was not discovered by the artists who paint homesteads. It took Mr. Duckitt more than three hours to reach Buck Bay by wagon from Waylands. Now he can do it in forty-five minutes, and he goes more often.

Hildagonda Duckitt (Mr. Wilferd Duckitt's great-aunt) and her "Diary of a Cape Housekeeper," described a Buck Bay holiday about eighty years ago: "One of our most delightful outings when living at Groote Post used to be the annual stay at Buck Bay - a cattle farm belonging to my eldest brother, with a picturesque old Colonial house," she wrote. "It had a voorhuis (hall or ante-room) opening into a large kitchen and store-room, and bedrooms on either side. To this place we went by ox-wagon generally, the roads being sandy, some of the elder ones driving in a cart and six horses; the wagons taking extra bedding, pillows and stores. There being no shops near, everything had to be thought of and taken; and it required two wagons. We always took cook and housemaid, and there was a boy who carried water and brought wood. The routine was - early coffee and rusks, then bathing, then a breakfast of a broiled Hottentot fish, just caught (most delicious and juicy) and bread and butter. Walking, fishing, then early dinner. The usual afternoon rest; coffee or tea and cake, as you like, and more fishing and walking and sitting on those grand rocks; supper

and bed. The gentlemen would shoot pheasants, partridges and buck. Thanks to the rest and change, we would all return home invigorated and strengthened, ready for the remaining summer days, which are long and trying.”

Miss Duckitt forgot to mention the row of bedrooms and stable added by Louwrens de Jongh to the original homestead. I found the building almost unchanged since Miss Duckitt’s day. Mr. Wilferd Duckitt’s father replaced the mud floors with timber; but the ceilings, with their yellowwood beams, are unaltered.

The pantry has a brandsolder of reeds and clay. In the kitchen there is an old bread-oven with iron door, still in use. This is a high room under the pitch of thatch, with the rough stone and clay walls nearly three feet thick. The stone was quarried along the beach and the thatching reeds came from the farm.

The homestead faces east. It is well protected from the southeaster by a rocky promontory, and only the north wind brings the aromas of the veld.

At other times the powerful sea air fills the house, and often the spray wets the lime-plastered facade. Fresh water is piped down to the house from a spring,

Buck Bay receives many gifts from the sea. Once a gaily-painted life-buoy from Lord Brassey’s yacht Sunbeam washed up on the beach. Bathers used it for years, until the sea took it again.

On a wall there still hangs a life-buoy from the barque British Peer, wrecked some miles to the north on a moonlight night in 1896. Only the cook and carpenter were saved, and they told Mr. Duckitt’s father that a light on the mainland had been mistaken for Dassen Island. Much cargo came up, and the farmers helped themselves.

One piece of Buck Bay flotsam was a wooden cradle. Several Duckitt babies made good use of it. Hatch-covers and gratings are often found, and recently a number of cans of beer drifted ashore. They did not look tempting. During the war a huge ship’s raft, with all the food, and equipment, washed up in a little bay.

Mr. Wilferd Duckitt's queerest find was the skeleton of a ship. He bought the adjoining farm of Buffels Rivier for his sheep some years ago; and he was riding there along the beach on a winter's day after a gale had scoured out the sand. There he saw the keel timbers and ribs of a large ship, exposed after many years. The sand covered the skeleton again, and no one can say how it came there or what ship it was.

The dunes at Buck Bay also hold their relics of the past. Mr. Duckitt has found the horns of large antelope there; and hippo bones have been unearthed near the Bok Rivier mouth. Above the homestead are the *Brulsand* dunes - the sand that roars and rumbles as you walk down the slope.

For many years a large fishing boat was kept at Buck Bay. Skipper and crew sailed up and down the Darling coast in the snoeking season, and supplied the farms in the district with crawfish and ration fish for the labourers. Mr. Duckitt's father often sent large baskets of grapes across to d'Almeida of Dassen Island, and the baskets would come back filled with penguin eggs. The

skipper died ten years ago, crews were hard to find, and now Mr. Duckitt has only a dinghy to supply his own household with "broiled Hottentot," still prepared according to Hildagonda Duckitt's recipe.

Buck Bay is a crawfish sanctuary which stretches three miles along the coast and one mile out to sea. A white beacon on the farm marks one limit of the sanctuary, but the fishermen do not always observe it. "Cutters anchor in the bay and poach right under our noses," declared Mr. Duckitt.

Deep water runs up to Bok Point and great seas roll in unchecked from far across the South Atlantic to break on the rocks. In fine weather many a galjoen is landed on those rocks. At low tide perlemoen, queen of Cape shellfish, are taken from the gullies.

In the spring Buck Bay has as brilliant a tapestry of wild flowers as any part of the Darling district. Mr. Duckitt's father first collected the seeds of the famous Buck Bay vygies which I have mentioned; and they have been grown in Cape

gardens for most of this century. These vygies (*Dorotheanthus criniflorus*) reveal the whole range of colours except blue. At Buck Bay, too, you find the edible elandsvye; they ripen at the beginning of November and are eaten green, unlike the sour fig which is picked when brown and dry.

Aloes with red flowers grow in the natural rockery near the Buck Bay homestead. The veld is covered with slaaibos, the succulent loved by cattle; melkbos, with its white juice; kersbos and wag-'n-bietjie and the Sonqua's reed named after the departed Sonqua Hottentots who made their huts of it long ago.

Oldest resident at Buck Bay is Mrs. Smuts, aged eighty-eight, who arrived there when her husband was appointed caretaker forty-four years ago. After her husband's death her son took on the job. They have a neat, thatched house near the homestead. Mrs. Smuts was born at Saldanha and has lived on this coast nearly all her life. At one period her husband became the driver of a horse

drawn hearse in Cape Town; but both of them were glad to return to the country.

Mrs. Smuts declares that only now is she beginning to feel the approach of old age - her memory is not quite what it was. Otherwise she is completely fit after a life of healthy work. And she is thankful that she does not have to do her shopping in Cape Town nowadays. Her son grows potatoes and other vegetables. As I have indicated, there are no meat or fish shortages. Mrs. Smuts assures me that there is no hardship in spending half one's life at Buck Bay.

So the weathered and mellow homestead stands in restful dignity year after year. Outside the kitchen grows a Norfolk pine. There are graves near the beach and more graves out towards Bok Point; nameless graves, possibly the victims of shipwreck in Dutch East India days; or just those old convicts who cut firewood and collected mussel shells two centuries ago.

There is no telephone at Buck Bay, and the Duckitts are not anxious to have one. Mrs.

Wilferd Duckitt gave me a true and vivid impression of Buck Bay when she remarked thoughtfully: "This place reminds me of the wagon days, the days before telephones - the days when trouble could not reach you."

Everyone in Cape Town knows the Martin Melck House in Strand Street, finest example of old Dutch architecture in the city. Not so many people know the Martin Melck farm on the Berg River - Kersefontein, held continuously by the family since 1760.

It would be almost impossible, I think, to find any other South African farm which has been in possession of one family for nearly two centuries. The Myburghs of Meerlust and the Faures of Eerste River may have a word to say about this, but there can be not other claimants. Kersefontein was acquired at the period when the first Martin Melck occupied Elsenburg, in the days of Governor Tulbagh.

Elsenburg was a wine farm and Melck held a contract to supply the Dutch East India Company's ships with wine. He had to have oxen for the wagons that hauled the wine casks to Table Bay; and at first Kersefontein was his cattle farm. It is a place of six thousand morgen, twenty miles from the Berg River mouth, a hundred miles by direct road from Cape Town. When the river floods its banks you must travel round by way of Piketberg, and then the journey is fifteen miles longer.

The Melcks have always been fond of horses and horse-racing, but the second Melck carried his sport rather too far. He lost Elsenburg and in 1796 he had to fall back on Kersefontein, a long journey by ox-wagon along the sandy coast track from Cape Town. It could be done in three days by wagonette with eight horses, however, so that he was not really a distant exile. Early last century the third Melck started breeding the horses for which Kersefontein is still famous. He, too, put up the gracious buildings which still form the homestead and outhouses.



The Martin Melck farm on the Berg River, held continuously by the family since 1760.

A point to bear in mind is that every member of the Melck dynasty, right down to the eldest son at the present time, has been named Martin. Kersefontein, by the way, has nothing to do with candles. The name comes from the wild cherries that grow on the farm.

Grain was first sown there in 1880, in the days when the Stephan brothers ran cutters up the river to load grain and carried it down to where their coasters waited off the river mouth. A bag of grain fetched sixteen shillings in Cape Town at that period; but the transport charge was six shillings a bag. Now the railway runs within sight of Kersefontein, and the freight of nine pence a bag leaves the producer in a far better position.

This sandy Berg River country is infested with moles, which became a serious menace when the Melcks began to cultivate the land on a large scale. They are the same golden moles which burrow into dams and sometimes cause the walls to burst.

The present Martin Melck declared war on moles about forty years ago. He bought dozens of traps, and aided by a Bushman-Hottentot hunter he caught four thousand moles in one year. Mr. Melck selected a hundred of the finest moleskins and presented them to the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Walter Hely Hutchinson, who had them dressed and made into a cloak for his wife. Thousands of skins were sent to England, where they fetched 1s. 6d. apiece. Mr. Melck still traps about two hundred moles a year.

It was at Kersefontein, of course, that the last hippo in the Berg River was shot. That was in February, 1869, and the large skull is preserved in the homestead. Early last century there were probably about twenty hippo in the river. Mr. Melck's great-grandfather once saw fifteen in one group. But at the middle of the century, although the hippo were protected, there were only four survivors.

These hippo were regarded as harmless, for they grazed with the cattle in the vleis. Once they capsized a boat, but no one was hurt. In the

summer of 1868, however, there was only one hippo left in the river; and loneliness seemed to make this old bull hippo vicious. In that year the hippo killed a coloured man on Mr. Melck's farm.

At different times Mr. Layard; of the Cape Town Museum, and that redoubtable hunter, the Duke of Edinburgh, searched the river in the hope of shooting the last doomed hippo. Both were unsuccessful. The lone bull seemed to have gone into hiding; though Mr. John Kotze, out after pheasant near Kersefontein, suddenly encountered the hippo in the reeds. He had followed his dog into the water when the hippo raised its head and made a dash for the dog. Mr. Kotze gave the hippo a charge of birdshot in the face and saved his dog; but the last hippo went back into hiding.

For weeks the crews of river cutters declared that they had not seen a trace of the criminal. Then, in February, 1869, four of Mr. Melck's coloured men were bathing near the house when the old bull rippled the surface.

The alarm was given, but one youth - Mr. Melck's faithful valet, 18-year-old Jan Tin - failed to reach the bank in time. The hippo seized him and dragged him under. Mr. Melck arrived with his loaded gun in time to see the hippo rising as though it intended to make another rush at the body of its victim. He fired at eighty yards range and hit just below the hippo's right ear.

Mr. Noble, Clerk of the House of Assembly, who was a guest at Kersefontein, described the scene: "The hippo circled three times, dashing the water in violent waves upon the bank," he said. "Mr. Melck fired a second shot and a Mr. van Schoor also fired, but both these shots missed. Next morning, however, the hippo was found dead at Watermeloen Drift a mile away. It had been carried up the river by the rising tide and the body had drifted into the reeds."

It took sixteen oxen to drag the carcass from the river, for it weighed nearly three thousand lbs. From snout to tail the hippo measured 11 ft. 6 inches. The age was estimated at twenty-eight years. Mr. Melck had killed it with a round ball

fired from a smooth bore Joe Manton gun presented to his father by Earl Caledon very early in the century.

Some of the meat was eaten, and the hippo was carefully skinned. This historic specimen is still to be seen in the South African Museum. The present Mr. Martin Melck has sometimes thought of re-stocking the Berg River with a pair of young hippo, but he has, been restrained by thoughts of the 1869 tragedy.

Small, distant relatives of the hippo family - small but fierce - still inhabit the dense reeds fringing Kersefontein's river boundary. They are pigs, domestic pigs that ran wild a century and a half ago; pigs that have become more ferocious than boars, bush pigs or warthogs.

These pigs have developed peculiar characteristics since their return to the wild. They have long muzzles and razor-edged tusks. Hundreds of them live in the thick bushes and reedy tunnels of the river bank. Some weigh two

hundred lbs. When hunted they attack men, horses and dogs with primitive savagery.

Mr. Melck finds the pigs useful for feeding his labourers, and pig hunts take place every week. He has produced a special breed of dog for the purpose, a cross between a bulldog and a nonde-script, dogs with pace and pluck. These dogs have been trained to grip a pig by the ear and hold it until the hunters arrive. It is a, far more thrilling sport than you might imagine. Many a man on Kersefontein carries scars made by a pig's tusks.

Hundreds of ostriches have also run wild on the farm since the end of the old feather boom. The nests are often found and Mrs. Melck uses the eggs for her cakes.

Kersefontein has seen many floods. The homestead is twenty feet above sea level and fifteen feet above summer low river level. No flood water has ever entered the doors; but in the 1822 flood, the highest of which Mr. Melck has any record, the water reached the stoep. Not until

1921 was there again a flood which approached the house.

When the Melcks first settled at Kersefontein they crossed the river by a drift eight miles upstream. During last century a flat boat was used; it fitted between the wheels of a cart, and the horses swam across. In 1893 a pont service was established. The teak boats and platform are still on the farm. Finally, in 1934, came the bridge.

There are few spots in the Cape as pleasant during September as Kersefontein. Then it is a land of vleis and spring flowers. No longer do the Melcks regret the loss of Elsenburg, which the first Martin Melck did so much to improve by clever designing. He was an architect from Prussia, founder of the Lutheran Church in Strand Street. There have been eight more Martin Melcks at Kersefontein and the Martin Melck House since his time - an unbroken line seen against the rich background of Cape history.

CHAPTER 19

GEORGE REX OF KNYSNA

NEARLY TWENTY YEARS AGO I was in the little South African town of Knysna on a delicate mission. I wished to learn all I could of that mysterious character George Rex - son of George III, King of England, and Hannah Lightfoot, the "fair Quakeress."

It would have been a hopeless task but for the help given by Miss Sanni Metelerkamp, author of books and plays, who was a newspaper colleague and old friend of mine. Miss Metelerkamp was a great-granddaughter of Rex. She was the historian of the family, and she had investigated the Rex story not only at the Cape, but in London. In her day, Miss Metelerkamp was the greatest living authority on the subject.

She warned me that it would be useless to approach certain members of the family. One might not imagine that the possibility of a bar sinister far back would still seal many lips; but there it was. Other descendants, however, were

proud of their origin and showed me their heirlooms and documents. Each day the drama mounted. I am still moved when I think of the strange career of that silent exile who founded Knysna and carried his secret to the grave.

Miss Metelerkamp died in 1945. She had devoted the last ten years of her life to filling in gaps in the Rex history. I saw her often during the last months, and she told me far more than I had gathered during the Knysna visit. At that time I had written the first connected, authoritative story of George Rex ever published. It brought me a number of revealing letters from far corners of South Africa. Now here are the facts and the legends in the light of later information.

The story opens in London about the year 1756, when there lived at the corner of Market-street, St. James, a beautiful girl named Hannah Lightfoot. She was known as the “fair Quakeress,” and she served in the shop of her uncle, a Quaker linen draper named Wheeler.

Hannah Lightfoot often caught the eye of Prince George (afterwards George III, King of England) during his walks and rides between Leicester-square and St. James’s Palace. One historian remarks: “She soon returned the attentions of such a lover.”

No one disputes that there was a love affair, and that they had two sons and a daughter. There is reason to believe that they were married - secretly, but legally. Long afterwards (in 1866) a marriage certificate and a will alleged to have been made by Hannah were produced as evidence in a court case. Netherclift, the handwriting expert of the period, declared the documents were genuine. The will read as follows:

Hampstead, July 7th, 1768.

“Provided I depart this life, I commend my two sons and my daughter to the kind protection of their Royal Father, His Majesty, George III, bequeathing whatever property I die possessed of to such dear offspring of my ill-fated marriage. In case of the death of each of my children, I

give and bequeath to Olive Wilmot, the daughter of my best friend, Dr. Wilmot, whatever property I am entitled to or am possessed of at the time of my death. Amen.

Witnesses

J. Dunning.

Hannah Regina

William Pitt

Lord Chief Justice Wilde ordered all the documents to be impounded and preserved in the strong room at Somerset House. Miss Metelerkamp, and other historians before and after her, made repeated efforts to gain access to this evidence. All of them failed. So the marriage is not proven.

Hannah Lightfoot vanished into obscurity, but not before Sir Joshua Reynolds had painted her portrait. It is in the possession of Lord Sackville; the portrait of a mature woman in a white satin dress; a woman with a calm, sad face and haunting eyes.

It is said that one son, John, was shipped off to India, and was drowned. The daughter Sarah

lived quietly in Bath and died in 1842 without arousing either gossip or publicity. The other son was known as George Rex. He had a legal training and is supposed to have been a equerry at the Court of George III. For some reason which can only be surmised it became desirable to dispose of him, too, and in October, 1797, he was sent to the new British colony at the Cape. He arrived to fill the well-paid post of "Marshal of the Admiralty," and he had ample private means.

Though the English career of George Rex is somewhat misty, his life in South Africa is on record and the Cape Archives have many books and documents tracing his progress.

From the first it was said openly that he was the King's son. In 1801 a Mr. George Twistle complained publicly that Mr. Rex had been presented with one of the best posts in the colony, simply because he was a son of George III. Mr. Twistle also wrote to his sister in England: "This so-called Rex is feted and the recipient of much honour on account of his being the son of our

King by a Quaker. He has been sent here with every comfort. Those who have called themselves the servants of the Colony are now the servants of Rex. You ask the reason? Rex is not only the son but the legitimate heir of our King, for his mother the Quaker, and King George, were joined in marriage before ever Queen Charlotte was thought of ...”

George Rex, ever gentle and dignified, kept his own counsel and avoided controversy. He bought a fine house and garden, Schoonder Zigt, from the Widow Freislich, lived in style in Table Valley, and carried out his duties with distinction when seafaring cases were heard at the Castle and pirates were tried by court-martial. He was granted a huge farm, Melkhout Kraal, on the edge of the wild, elephant-infested Knysna forests; and sometimes he journeyed there to see what progress his slaves were making.

Then came the return to Dutch rule for a few years, and George Rex had to sell his town property under the proclamation of Governor Janssens. So before Popham and Baird seized the

Cape again in 1806, Rex found himself without residence or occupation. He was an energetic man in the prime of life, and an idle life in the gay Cape society of those days did not appeal to him. A farmer at heart, he decided to settle at Knysna.

The trek of more than three hundred miles was a serious undertaking in those days, especially as Rex intended to establish himself as a squire and live in a civilised manner. A sea voyage to Knysna would have been less arduous, but at that time no vessel had entered the Heads and anchored in the sheltered bay. The harbour was thought to be unsafe.

Late in 1804 a cavalcade of coaches, wagons and cattle swung out of the shadow of Table Mountain under the leadership of George Rex, bound for the distant coast. The household servants, artisans and the hundred slaves filled sixteen wagons. Rex himself travelled in a coach bearing the Royal Coat of Arms (to which his former post entitled him) and drawn by six white horses.



Cottages at Knysna, built in the days of George Rex.

Knysna in those days must have seemed to the exiled George Rex like a corner of England - an impression which this green forest country still leaves in the minds of travellers. The river and the woods were gorgeous with bird life, from egret to flamingo. Huge elephants and buffalo were seen in the forests. The veld was alive with buck.

There is a pretty legend that Rex was authorised to claim all the land he could see from a high point near the river mouth. This, unfortunately, is pure fancy. Rex had been granted an enormous farm, and he soon purchased from their owners those other famous properties which he called Melkhout Kraal, Eastford and Westford. His whole domain covered 20,296 acres, and included much valuable forest land.

George Rex, undoubtedly, was a man who would now be described as "the right type of settler." Melkhout Kraal, where he built his mansion, became an outpost of civilisation in that wild territory. "It is more like a Fairy land than an ordinary South African cattle run," wrote one early traveller.

Rex had a wife and four children when he left Cape Town for Knysna. Proof of the marriage is not to be found. One of his sons, however, left this statement on record: "My father was the second son of George III and Hannah Lightfoot. He lived in South Africa on land provided by the government, with an annual grant from the government, on condition that he did not return to England and that he did not marry. He did marry, but the grant was continued."

The name of his first wife was Elizabeth Unger or Ungria. She may have been a widow, and she certainly had children. A foreigner, she was also a woman of some means; for there is proof that she owned a number of slaves. Four years after arrival at Knysna she passes out of the picture. Miss Metelerkamp thought she had died there, but no grave has been located.

The second Mrs. Rex was Carolina Margareta Unger (or Ungria), and she was a relative of Elizabeth. Again there is no proof of a marriage; but she was received in the highest society at the Cape, and nowhere in the detailed records of the

period does one find a suggestion of an irregular union. Mr. William Harrison, a traveller who visited Melkhout Kraal in 1830, wrote a description for the English magazine "Notes and Queries," in which he remarked: "Mrs. Rex had originally come of German parentage. She was kind and affable. Mr. George Rex was then about 68 years of age, of strong, robust appearance and the exact resemblance in feature to George III." Another writer said that Mrs. Rex often wore a headdress of three ostrich feathers in the evenings.

Rex was an affectionate father. His children were taught mathematics, French, Latin, drawing, music and dancing, several tutors having come to reside at Melkhout Kraal. Most of the amenities of cultured life were to be found there. Everyone dressed for dinner at night. The "Old Place," as Melkhout Kraal was afterwards called, was famous as a mansion where visitors received the most lavish hospitality.

As the years passed, the Rex family grew until there were six sons and seven daughters. Edward, the eldest son, was slightly deaf. He never married. Like his father he loved the land and remained at Melkhout Kraal all his life. John Rex, the second son, "a man of princely manners and conspicuous ability," became his father's right-hand man, and made a name for himself as an explorer of unknown parts of the Cape coast. Jacob was musical. He was appointed superintendent of government forests. Frederick qualified as a land surveyor. George, a farmer, is remembered by many people still living, for he died in 1899 - last survivor of the first generation of male Rexes. He bore a strong resemblance to Queen Victoria's cousin, the Duke of Clarence. Thomas Henry, the youngest son, entered the civil service, but retired to Knysna to take up farming.

Some of the daughters were sent to Cape Town to finish their education; and most of them married into noble English families. Though the "Old Place" was far from the aristocracy of the Castle in Cape Town, many gallant young officers and

high officials journeyed to Knysna and were entertained by George Rex. There was, for example, Lieutenant (afterwards Captain) Thomas Duthie, of the 72nd Highlanders, who married Caroline Rex; Captain John Fisher Sewell, who married Maria Rex; and Mr. Atkinson, of Armagh, who became the husband of Sarah Rex.

Elizabeth Caroline, the eldest girl, never married. Lord Charles Somerset, Governor of the Cape, used to pit his wits against her at chess. Louisa Rex, a blue-eyed girl with auburn hair, was the only daughter who ever left the country for good. She married the Rev. Charles Bull and went with him to England. Bull tried to solve the Rex secret and would probably have done so, but he was suddenly appointed to the Falkland Islands and kept there for fifteen years. I think that is a significant link in the chain of evidence.

One day an artist arrived at Melkhout Kraal with the intention of painting George Rex and his family. He was hospitably received; but Rex made it clear that he could paint nothing but scenery. There is no painting of George Rex or

any member of the first generation except Frederick, the surveyor. The artist met Frederick away from home (and George Rex's influence) and persuaded him to sit for a portrait. The royal likeness in this painting is startling. After the death of George Rex an early travelling photographer secured portraits of a few of the sons and daughters.

The unmistakable, heavy Hanoverian profile of George III has persisted in every generation of the Rex family down to the present day. To my mind, it is the strongest proof of the legend. A single likeness would not carry conviction; but when you come upon a family full of Queen Victorias, King Edward the Seventh, and so on, then no reasonable doubt remains. This I have seen myself, and I am convinced. I am told that the Hannah Lightfoot likeness has also cropped up again and again.

The "Old Place," like the daughters, grew in beauty year by year. Gardens with rare plants

were laid out. A watermill and a blacksmith's shop were built. Orchards, vineyards, orange trees and avenues of oaks appeared. Mulberry trees were planted, and it is recorded that Rex sent 12 lb. of silk, spun by his daughters to London. He made cider and brandy.

Rex kept ostriches on his farm - several well-known early travellers mention the fact. It is probable that such an enterprising man exported feathers; and in that case he would be the real founder of the South African industry.

His diary, like so many other treasures of the "Old Place," was destroyed in one of a series of disastrous fires. A few scraps written in 1833-34 remain, however, and give vivid glimpses into the daily life of this busy man. He speaks of sealing expeditions to Plettenberg Bay, elephant hunts, the visits of ships - and letters from Cape Town ruined in the post-bag by a broken flask of brandy. There are frequent entries telling of foals killed by "wolves," which were, of course, spotted hyenas. Nowhere is there a mention of his past. It is said that George Rex destroyed his

private papers one day when he returned home unexpectedly to find his wife looking through the drawers in his desk; but that is only a family legend.

Among distinguished visitors was the Earl of Caledon in 1811, who presented Rex with a silver cup. Lieutenant Foster, R.N., and his wife and child, were guests at the "Old Place" after the wreck of H.M.S. Emu - the first vessel to enter Knysna harbour. You can still see the bones of the Emu, almost buried in a sand-spit, at low tide, though the ship was lost in 1817.

Dr. James Barry, the woman who worked at the Cape as a physician disguised in male clothing for many years, was another visitor who stayed in that hospitable mansion. She once accompanied Lord Charles Somerset, who was the guest of George Rex on several occasions. Rex's slaves realised immediately that the doctor was a woman, and gave her the Afrikaans nick-name of "Kapok Nooientjie," the "cotton-wool lady," because she padded her male clothes to disguise the feminine curves. There was a dramatic

contrast indeed - George Rex and Barry - two famous people with secrets.

Great people in Cape history were guests at Melkhout Kraal. Burchell, Latrobe, Steedman, George Thompson and many other author-travellers wrote their impressions of Rex and Knysna. The controversial Dr. Vanderkemp of the London Mission Society stayed there. Sir Andries Stockenström, Sir Lawry Cole, Colonel Michell the surveyor - all knew Rex and his family. Rex gave a special welcome to two Quaker visitors, James Backhouse and George Washington Walker. No doubt their speech and ways reminded him of his mother.

After the "Old Place" had been destroyed three times by fire, George Rex moved to the "New Place," later called Rexford. There he continued to lead his polished life, a man of great dignity, but with secret sorrows and perhaps, ambitions unfulfilled. He used to wander in the solitude of his fine garden, hands behind his back, hearing voices from far away and answering them aloud.

"No, no, Your Grace, I cannot agree with you."
Then a silence.

"Yes, Your Royal Highness, I think I can do that."

George Rex had left many good friends in England. Once he received word that an East India Company's ship, with a number of these friends on board, was bound from Bombay for Knysna. He must have waited eagerly for them, happier than he had been for years; for his friends would sweep away some of the longings of an exile and bring back the dead past.

The ship arrived and anchored far out, off the open coast near Knysna. A crowded boat came surging in upon the heavy swell; and the heart of George Rex must have beat faster as he watched. Imagine his horror when the boat broached-to in the surf and every soul was drowned. He buried them with his own hands, and returned to the "New Place," a lonely man. He never spoke of the tragedy, but it is just possible that his own brother John was among those drowned that day.

It was after this disaster that Rex started his campaign to persuade the Admiralty that Knysna was a safe harbour. He surveyed the lagoon, found that there was sufficient depth of water on the bar to allow ships to enter, and chartered a deep channel for miles up the river. With the aid of this information, shipmasters lost their fear of the narrow entrance between the rocky Heads. Old records show that from 1817 to the time of Rex's death in 1839, a total of 162 ships visited Knysna, and there were only four wrecks during that period.

Delays in exporting timber owing to a shortage of coastal shipping led Rex to build a vessel of his own. He sent to Simon's Town for a ship-builder, caulkers and indentured servants skilled in the work; and in 1826 the keel of the brig Knysna was laid. She was built of stinkwood - the teak of South Africa - and 50 years later she was still afloat as a coal carrier along the coasts of England.

It was in this little ship of 140 tons that John Rex explored little-known stretches of the coastline

between Cape Town and Durban. The Knysna was the first vessel to land cargo on the banks of the Buffalo River, where East London now stands. It seems a pity that the name Port Rex, given to the harbour by John Rex, should have been forgotten. Other voyages, as far east as the Isle of France (now Mauritius), and as far west as St. Helena, were made by the Knysna before she was sold.

On his death-bed, George Rex asked his family to obliterate the Royal crest from the household silver and cutlery. He also asked them to bury him on the estate - not in England. Many questions must have come to their lips as their father lay dying; but he had told them nothing throughout his life, and now they dared not ask.

The people of Knysna walked in heavy rain, some of them for twenty miles, to attend the funeral of George Rex in April, 1839. One newspaper obituary notice paid the greatest tribute of all to



In Memory of George Rex , Esquire, Proprietor and Founder of Knysna. 1839.

the royal founder of the town. “He left no enemy behind.”

Today the grave is neglected. It is to be found with difficulty less than a mile outside Knysna on the road to Plettenberg Bay. The marble tombstone bears the simple inscription: “In Memory of George Rex, Esquire, Proprietor and Founder of Knysna. 1839.”

His will gave no clue to the secret. George Rex instructed that his estate should be divided into sixteen equal parts, thirteen shares to the thirteen children and three shares to his wife.

Among the fragments of evidence in Miss Metelerkamp’s possession was a yellowed cutting from an unnamed newspaper which printed this paragraph shortly after the death of George Rex:

“There died recently at the HUYNSA, South Africa, no less a personage than George Rex, the morganatic son of George III. In the early part of this century a sailing vessel left England under sealed orders. It made for the Cape, and the illustrious son of a morganatic union between

George III and Hannah Lightfoot, the Quakeress, got a grant of land, as much as he wished for, in our then new South African possessions. He selected the HUYDNA, a beautiful, well-wooded and well-watered tract of land and was made Marshal of the Cape. A great many relics of George III are preserved as heirlooms in the family. George Rex was always very reticent as regards his descent. A few years ago a gentleman, who did not know of his descent, was touring through Germany and at the castle of Nurnberg he saw a large painting of George III. 'How very like my old friend George Rex in South Africa!' he exclaimed to a friend who knew of the romantic life of George Rex."

Royal interest in the Rex family has not lessened since the death of George Rex. When the Duke of Edinburgh visited Knysna in 1864, to shoot elephants, he chose no one but Rex men to form his personal bodyguard during that memorable adventure. Mr. George Rex, fifth son of the founder, was appointed "Captain of the Hunt,"

while another Rex carried the Duke's 18 lb. elephant gun.

There have been other royal visitors to Knysna since then; and all of them have shown that they are familiar with the story of George Rex. They have examined the relics which escaped the fires - those old, romantic things which are not made today. I saw them, and handled with a thrill the ebony baton, mounted with a silver crown, which was the symbol of George Rex's office as Marshal of the Admiralty.

There is a medallion with a bust of George III by Wedgwood - a delicate and valuable relic. A rosewood chair which Rex brought out from England with him. Some wine-glasses, many coins, and a seal engraved, "Though lost to sight to memory dear," which was handed to Rex by George III as a parting gift when he left England.

During the South African War, when General Smuts and his commando were reported to be planning an attack on Knysna, many of the most valued Rex possessions were buried. On this

occasion, as on many others, those who hid them could not locate the exact spots afterwards.

Parchment manuscripts, including George Rex's commission as Marshal of the Admiralty, were found - all blank when taken from the earth.

There is still old silver under the Knysna soil, and even in recent times the plough has turned up a few ornaments of long ago in the fields where once the "Old Place" stood.

Other lost possessions are remembered by members of the Rex family still living. There was a harp which was played by one of George Rex's daughters while the others sang "She wore a wreath of roses" and songs of those days. A spinet with tiny feet, made to stand on a table. A musical box which played "Pop goes the weasel." There survives a Wedgwood jug which the old slaves, Caesar or Cupido or Adoons, would fill with water several times a day for their master. And a case of stuffed English birds marvellously preserved.

But I remember most clearly the heavy, velvet photograph albums of the Victorian era, and the portraits of men in tightly-buttoned coats, with beards or side-whiskers, and women in the skirts and hats which seem so quaint today. They were the descendants of George Rex; and if I had known nothing of this story I would have identified them without hesitation as bygone members of the British royal family.

That is all I intend to tell of the story of George Rex, a gentleman who left behind a tradition of kindness and courage worthy of a king, though he ruled, not a great country, but only a wild corner of South Africa.

CHAPTER 20

LLOYD OF THE LAGOON

Daar kom die Alabama

Ver, ver oor die see

Daar kom die Alabama

Ver, ver, ver oor die see.

COLOURED PEOPLE AT THE CAPE sing that folk-song today with the same fine sense of

harmony as they did when the Southern commerce-raider appeared in South African waters in July, 1863.

They sing it at every carnival and picnic, and the Afrikaans words need no translation. The song came spontaneously from unknown minstrels who watched the barquentine-rigged steamer capture the Federal barque Sea Bride outside Table Bay. Deeply stirred by the exploits of Captain Semmes, the people of Cape Town and the coast made heroes of the whole ship's company and talked of the Alabama for months.

And the Alabama never disappointed them. She came and went mysteriously and returned with fresh tales of adventure. Some of her men were entertained so well on shore that they deserted - though Semmes blamed the Yankee Consul "with his usual unscrupulousness." Several of them never returned, and Semmes wrote bitterly: "This is another of those remarkable interpretations of neutrality in which John Bull seems to be so particularly fertile."

About seven months before the Alabama's arrival, two young seamen from New York named George Albert Lloyd and Cornelius Gallagher slipped on shore from a Yankee clipper berthed in Table Bay Docks. They had seen enough of the hard life of the sea, and they simply walked away, leaving their kit behind, into the gracious countryside of Dutch homesteads, vineyards and orchards.

More than half a century later I was on holiday at Saldanha Bay, a paradise for a schoolboy fond of sailing and fishing. In a village store I noticed a lean old man with a Yankee face and Abraham Lincoln beard.

"Yes, stare hard sonny, for it's not every day you'll see a man who came off the Alabama," said the storekeeper. "Stare hard - that's Lloyd of the lagoon."

So I gaped at old Lloyd and watched him as he strode off to his boat, made sail, and steered away down the lagoon to a still more isolated village on the far side. I did not know then, of



George Albert Lloyd, the American sailor who founded Church Haven on the lagoon at Langebaan, with his wife, sons, daughter and grand-children. The group was photographed in 1908.

course, that the storekeeper had mixed up Lloyd's history a bit. That solitary glimpse lingered in my memory, however, and I always wished that I had spoken to the old man.

Lloyd died in October, 1916, not long after my glimpse. But now at last I can visualize his life almost as though he had talked to me that day when I saw him beside his beloved lagoon. From his sons, and a daughter, and faded letters from America, I pierced together a strange fragment of history.

Lloyd was born at Hudson in the State of New York in 1842. One of his sisters wrote to his descendants: "George left home for a sea voyage in October, 1858, when he was sixteen. (I was eight). We had the Civil War, and he never returned to us."

So there were the two young Americans turning their backs on the sea and tramping into a land perfumed with flowers and fruit. They reached the Paarl district feeling extremely hungry; but they had a little money and they called at a

farmhouse to buy food. "Loop!" shouted the farmer. As they passed an open window the odour of newly-baked bread greeted them, and the famished men stole a loaf.

They turned westwards from Paarl, meeting better hospitality, and at last they came to the lagoon that runs south from Langebaan for eight miles ... the shining salt lagoon and the, flamingos with pink feathers just flushing the whiteness of their plumage ... the lagoon where a great hush rests like a benediction over the unruffled surface.

The sight of it gripped them as it has often fascinated me. Gallagher found work on a farm on the eastern side of the lagoon. Lloyd gazed across three miles of water. Impelled by some instinct which was more than curiosity, he declared: "I must go on to the far side."

It was Christmas Eve. Someone rowed Lloyd across and left him there with nothing but a bottle of water and a lump of biltong. He walked down

the beaches, finding no human beings, and slept under a bush.

Before dawn he heard shots fired and trudged on in that direction. In the southern corner of the lagoon, at Schryver's Hock, he found a thatched homestead with fishing boats on the beach. He was welcomed by three Frenchmen who were celebrating Christmas Day with gunshots. Peter de Montfort, owner of the fishery, invited young Lloyd to join them round their barrel of wine. As the sun came up they rolled the empty barrel out of the door.

De Montfort was a married man with several daughters. Lloyd, an experienced seaman, made himself useful in the fishing boats and found a home at Schryver's Hoek. He had seen the world, it was more comfortable than the forecastle of an American clipper ship, and he stayed on.

Often after a good catch De Montfort and Lloyd loaded an ox-wagon with smoked and salt fish and made leisurely journeys from village to village, to Malmesbury, Paarl and Wellington.

The spell worked on Lloyd as it has on many another man from across the sea. And at the end of each journey there was always the calm lagoon, so restful after the life of a clipper ship, so warming to a man who had frozen off Cape Horn.

No one can say whether young Lloyd was ever homesick, but he was soon to be reminded vividly of the land he had left. Without previous warning the Alabama steamed into Saldanha Bay on the morning of July 29, 1863. It was her first landfall on the South African coast. Semmes had put into that lonely harbour to reconnoitre; he wanted to be sure there were no enemy ships in Table Bay.

Many of the Saldanha farmers had never seen a steamer before. News of the Alabama spread through the district, and from all parts the ox-wagons came lumbering down to the bay. And among the boats that clustered round the Alabama was one with De Montfort and Lloyd on board.

George Lloyd must have gazed upon the shining guns of the Alabama with mixed feelings. These men swaggering about the decks, flushed with their

sea victories, were Americans - and enemies of his own people.

But the white farmers of Saldanha, slave-owners themselves only a quarter of a century before, were whole-heartedly with the South. Captain Semmes wrote of them: "From far and near the country people flocked in to see us, everyone with game or some curiosity to offer ... wild peacock, ostrich-eggs fresh from the nest, plumes of ostrich-feathers, springbok. We showed them around the ship, the young boers lifting our 100-pound rifle-shot and looking over the sights of our guns, and the young women looking at the moustaches of my young officers ... They all speak Dutch, and it is rare to find one among them who speaks English ... Some of the female visitors were plump, ruddy Dutch girls whose large rough hands and awkward bows and curtseys showed them to be honest lasses from the neighbouring farms, accustomed to milking cows and churning butter."

Semmes landed to secure a sight for his chronometers. It was the first time he had set foot in Africa, and he noted the wild flowers and the

fine sheep. For breakfast his host on shore gave him venison steak. Semmes allowed a number of his officers to go out shooting; the Alabama's company were heartily tired of salt beef and salt pork, and game was (and still is) abundant round Saldanha.

At the end of the day's hunting occurred the tragedy which Lloyd often described to his children in later years. The officers returned to the beach at sundown with enough buck and pheasant for a feast. One of the last to enter the boat was Third Engineer Cummings. He had forgotten to unload his shotgun. As he stepped into the boat the hammer of the gun touched the gunwale and the buckshot shattered his chest. Cummings fell dead on the sand.

As far as I can gather Lloyd had been a silent observer of the entertaining of the Alabama's crew. But all the farmers attended the funeral of Cummings, and Lloyd went, too. The funeral took place next morning, the Southern colours were at half mast, and all the officers and men who could be spared fell in on shore and marched to the

family burial ground on the farm Kliprug close to the bay. I have seen the marble tombstone, cracked by many summers, but with the inscription still clear.

Sacred
to the Memory
of
SIMEON W. CUMMINGS
Assistant Engineer
of the Confederate States
Steamer Alabama
who died Aug. 3rd 1863
from the accidental
discharge of a gun
in his own hands.
Aged 36 years.

Soon afterwards the Alabama steamed out bound for Table Bay, as I have described, and Lloyd went back to his fishing.

So the years slipped by peacefully for Lloyd, and De Montfort's daughters were growing up. Lloyd might have returned to New York; but his

decision to remain beside the lagoon is fully explained by an entry I found in the local marriage register:

“March 26, 1867. George Albert Lloyd (full age), fisherman of Schryver's Hoek, and Ellen de Montfort (17).”

Two years later Navigating Lieutenant W. E. Archdeacon of the Royal Navy arrived at Saldanha to survey the bay and lagoon. He engaged Lloyd and other fishermen to assist him, and Lloyd served as leadsmen. While taking soundings in the Saldanha Bay entrance, Lloyd made a valuable discovery. All large-scale charts since that time have marked the sand-bank Lloyd found as Lloyd Bank - a fitting tribute to the conscientious American sailor who recognised a danger to navigation which previous chart-makers had missed.

The little fishing village at Schryver's Hoek grew as children were born and more fishermen arrived. A travelling schoolmaster had been visiting Schryver's Hoek and other isolated

places, spending a few days with each group of children. Lloyd decided that a permanent school was needed, and in 1873 he applied to the Church of England authorities for the post of teacher. He was appointed, and opened a school at Boer Plein beside the lagoon.

Archbishop William West Jones visited Boer Plein in 1875 and wrote: "Here Mr. Lloyd is schoolmaster and has laboured in a simple, uncomplaining way, though it must be solitary and uphill work."

The archbishop fell under the spell of the lagoon, however, and noted in his diary: "There is to my mind a great charm about the simplicity of these people, and I always feel taken out of the common world, with its cares, its excitements and its affections, when I find myself among them. Their religion, if not ostentatious, is, I am sure, all the more real and true. I cannot wish any one a happier haven of rest in which to spend a month or so than on the shores of one of these beautiful bays."

Some years afterwards Lloyd and his family had to move from Schryver's Hoek, as the farm on which their house stood had been sold. Lloyd built himself a cottage two miles up the lagoon on an uninhabited spot known as Potbakkery. (The weird geological formation of the cliffs there must have reminded someone of a pottery. Lloyd taught the lagoon children for a quarter of a century, and only retired when one of his sons succeeded him.

After the Alabama the only American callers at Saldanha Bay were the New Bedford and Nantucket whalers. Lloyd was always eager to go on board these grimy "spouters" and hear American accents again. They called fairly often up to the end of last century.

Lloyd's sons told me that their father wept over the American Civil War long after the end of the struggle. No other war disturbed his calm until the South African War broke out in 1899. Towards the end of that conflict, when the Boers were almost in despair, General Smuts created a diversion by invading the Cape Colony with a

picked commando. Smuts brought the war close to the lagoon. One day Lloyd received orders to hide all the fishing boats, as Smuts and his men were in the neighbourhood.

It was true. Many of the people took refuge on board a British liner in Saldanha Bay, and a British cruiser steamed in as escort. Lloyd regarded himself as a neutral and remained on shore. He witnessed one of the strangest incidents of the South African War - an action between the commando and the cruiser. The Boers opened fire with their rifles and the cruiser shelled the commando. Not a man was killed on land or sea, though the naval shells blew some cattle to pieces at the place now known as Oorlog's Vlei.

Not long after the end of the South African War a treasure-hunting expedition visited Saldanha Bay and called in the aid of old Lloyd, the chart maker. Lloyd was able to pilot their boat to the spot where the bones of the Dutch East India ship Meresteyn lay submerged off Jutten Island.

Although the wreck was then two centuries old, silver coins and much more rarely a gold piece were still washing up on the island after heavy winter gales. The money-chests are still there, in fourteen fathoms. Lloyd did his best for the treasure hunters, but the weather was against them and the diver never had a chance of reaching the chests.

Then Lloyd suggested that it might be worth exploring a legendary treasure ship in the calm lagoon. Not far from Church Haven there are traces of the fort built by soldiers of the Dutch East India Company at Oude Post - the seventeenth century outpost where a garrison was always maintained. Opposite the ruined fort, in the deep channel leading into the lagoon, is the treasure ship. Some say she is the Dutch ship Middelburg, which sank in flames in 1781 after a battle with the British.

Lloyd anchored the boat of the treasure hunters right over the wreck in the lagoon. He had good reason to know the spot, for the fishermen had often torn their nets on the old ship's timbers.

This time it seemed an easy task for the diver. He sent up an old cannon and fragments of porcelain the first day; and the treasure hunters congratulated Lloyd and promised him a share in the venture.

Next day the diver had no sooner reached the bottom when he signalled urgently that he wished to be hauled to the surface. "I don't mind sharks," declared the diver when they hurriedly unscrewed his face-glass." I can deal with sharks, but there's an octopus the size of an ox down there, and I'm not going again - not for any money."

That was the end of the treasure hunt. Lloyd missed another possible fortune when he failed to recognize the value of the enormous bed of fossilised oyster shell on the floor of the lagoon. (There is only one other deposit like it in the world, and that is at Chesapeake Bay on the Virginia and Maryland coasts.) No one has been able to discover why the oysters died; but thousands upon thousands of tons remain. Lloyd lived to see a dredger at work, picking up the

shell with grabs. It is pounded into grit for poultry farmers or burnt for the lime.

Lloyd was a great churchman. He built a new church on the high sand dune at Potbakkery in 1905 and named the village he had founded Church Haven. The dedication festival is still one of the annual events of the quiet village.

Ground at Church Haven belongs to families. Besides the many Lloyd descendants and the De Montforts, there are the Barsbys of English seafaring stock, the Meyers who came from St. Helena, the Caswells (originally French), and the Wilseners, whose great-great-grandfather was a seaman from Holland. Some of the girls have married Norwegians, who have been whaling out of Saldanha for most of this century.

The Church Haven people are still a race apart, devoted to their church and village and lagoon. Seldom do the men settle elsewhere; they are homesick when they stay away for long. It is still possible to build a cottage from local materials for £200. Reeds for thatching can be cut on the veld.

Chalkstone and lime are available. Only the timber has to be bought. So the thatched cottage remains in favour, though I saw a modern villa which cost £500.

Many of the cottages have gardens with fig trees, guavas and vines. Between the village and the South Atlantic coast, on the long peninsula, the people have vegetable patches and some keep sheep and cattle.

“They save the money they earn by working at the whaling station in the season, and are better off than they appear to be,” someone who knew Church Haven for years told me. “They do not care about the outside world. Even the two World Wars did not move them deeply.”

At one time Church Haven people looked askance at visitors, and they are still suspicious of intruders. A former clergyman once suggested that they might build holiday bungalows and take visitors boating on the lagoon. They would not hear of it. “We have an unwritten agreement to keep strangers out,” they replied. The clergyman

remarked to me: “I cannot blame them. They are a great brotherhood, and nothing disturbs their peace of mind.”

Favourite food of the lagoon people is *bokkems* - the salted and sun-dried harders and maasbankers they catch in their own nets. In every cottage you find *bokkems* being smoked in the chimney. They prefer the tasty *bokkems* to fresh fish, munch it in their boats, eat it every day in their homes.

Lloyd's eldest son, Mr. Samuel Henry Lloyd of Church Haven, is 78, and he has many stories to tell of events during his father's lifetime. He told me of the day over fifty years ago when a steamer loaded with paraffin was wrecked on the coast to the north of Church Haven. George Lloyd smelt it miles away, and found a lonely beach littered for miles with thousands of cases of paraffin. That wreck kept the village lamps alight for years, and they sold many tins to a storekeeper at a shilling a tin.

Rafters and window-frames in the old Church Haven cottages are made from the timbers of

wrecked ships. The finest wreck of all was a ship with a cargo of whisky in barrels, cases of soap, shaving brushes, airtight tins of cigarettes and chocolates, and rolls of dress materials. Customs officers appeared after a time. Then the lagooners filled long stalks of sea bamboo with whisky to get it past the officers. For some time afterwards the women had new dresses every week and the men had free drinks.

One of the memorable incidents of Lloyd's lifetime was a minor tidal wave that rolled up the lagoon on a winter's morning in 1877, damaged many of the low-lying cottages and swept the gardens. It has never happened again, but since then most of the new cottages have been built on higher ground.

Lloyd, as I have said, died in 1916. His widow had reached her ninetieth year when she died in 1940. They had eight sons and six daughters.

During his last illness Lloyd destroyed all the letters from his American sisters. One of his sisters had supplied him with American books

and magazines throughout the half century and more that he had lived beside the lagoon. This sister wrote to the widow just after Lloyd's death: "It is strange that there should be so few of us left here in America, while so many Lloyds are living in South Africa. In the old days George's letters were sent to all the others for reading."

The seafaring tradition persists in the Lloyd family. Another son, Mr. J. C. Lloyd (74) of Goodwood, told me: "The sea is in my blood. I have four sons - two in trawlers and two in the Antarctic whalers."

Last time I was in Church Haven I met the oldest man in the village, 92-year-old Mr. Constant Meyer. He told me that he had just revisited Cape Town, and had found many changes. He had not been to town for nearly fifty years.

Old Meyer is the last man in the village who was there when the Alabama steamed into Saldanha Bay. He was a very small boy then, and now he is a Rip van Winkle. But he has lived a calm and pleasant life. I think that old George Albert

Lloyd, too, had no regrets when he came to the end of his life by those shining waters, a true lover of the land of the afternoon.

THE END



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Renosterbos
Rex, George
Riebeeck Kasteel
Riebeeck Kasteel
Riebeeck West
Riordan, W.T.
Ritter, J.C.
Rix-dollar
Robertson
Robinson, A.M. Lewin
Rondeboschjesberg
Roodezand
Sam Sly's Journal
Sandoleanhout
Sangiro (Pienaar, A.A.)
Sarie Marais
Schernbrucker, Miss Gertrude
Schoolmasters
Scorpion stings

Sequah
Sewejaartjie
Silver (Cape)
Simonsberg
Sir Lowry's Pass
Smous
Smuts, Dr. Johannes
Snails
Sneeuwkop
Snow
Snuff
Somerset, Lord Charles
Sparrman, Andrew
Spencer, Dr. H.A.
Sprigg, Sir Gordon
Stage-coaches
Stinkblaar
Stinkwood
Stokoe, T.P.
Strawberries
Surgeons

Sutherland
Sutton, Dr. J.R.
Swartberg Pass
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Tamboers Kloof
Tandpynwortel
Teewaterkonfyt
Thompson, George
Thunberg, Dr. Carl Peter
Tobacco
Token money
Tornado
Toverkop
Tramps
Trotter, Mrs. Alys Fane
Tulbagh Pass
Turlington
Tygerberg
Vaaljapie
Van der Byl, Major Piet
Van der Hum

Van Dessin, Joachim
Van Duyn, Jeanette
Van Riebeeck Society
Van Riebeeck's hedge
Venter, Dr. P.J.
Versfeld, T.
Versterk Druppels
Village origins
Vrymansfontein
Waaihoek
Wagons
Warm Bokkeveld
Watercress
Watermelon
Waterstun, Dr. Jane
Weather
Wellington
Wenning, Pieter
Werner, Hilbert
West, W.C.
Wild garlic

Wild sorrel

Windmills

Wintervogel

Wolfaardt, Tant Mieta

Wolve Dans

Worcester

Zebrakop